238 PRODUCTS REVIEWED!

SEPTEMBER 2014
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TILL DEBT DO US PART
The cost of getting hitched

TESTS
Fridges
TVs
Dryers
Line trimmers
Leaf blowers
Secateurs
Wireless speakers
Sandwich makers
Rice cookers

CUTTING EDGE
We rate the best garden tools

BROKEN PROMISES
The truth about price matching

OUT OF POCKET?
We reveal what's worrying Australians

Feeling the pinch?

You're not alone. As our inaugural Consumer Pulse survey found, many Aussie households are feeling financial pressure

At CHOICE, we have been noticing for some time that there's something happening in the economy that economic commentators have not been picking up on. Although interest rates and inflation are low, many households report that they are feeling financial pressure.

While the headline inflation figures don't show a spike in expenses, the reality is that some core areas of household expenditure, like energy, have been growing at alarming rates. Wages growth, on the other hand, has stagnated for many employees. And for people dependent on interest from investments, low interest rates mean low returns.

We decided that it was time to put voice to these concerns, which is why we ran our first national Consumer Pulse survey. This was reported extensively in the national media – reflecting that the findings struck a chord.

Households told us that they are cutting back where they can – not only on non-essential items but also on essentials. And many people are concerned about what the future holds.

Around one-fifth of people told us that they had lived off a credit card to get through to pay day within the past 12 months. This is an important finding because credit cards seem to be magically shielded from drops in interest rates. While the RBA cash rate has gone down by 2.25 percentage points since November 2011, credit card rates have only been discounted by a meagre 0.2 percentage points, on average, over the same period.

It is still possible to pay around 20% interest on a credit card, especially if you have a rewards card with one of the big four banks. If you are not able to repay your balance in full every month, it's definitely worth shopping around – as our article on page 23 highlights, interest rates on the cheapest cards are as low as 8.99%.

One time that you are more likely to lean upon a credit card is when planning for a big life event, like a wedding. Balancing the desire for that special day with the limits of your budget can be incredibly challenging.

Anybody who has organised a wedding will tell you that prices seem to balloon whenever you mention the W word, so we decided to put that to the test. We hired two actors to request quotes for events that were similar in every respect – except that one was described as a birthday party, the other a wedding. In a number of cases, our wedding shadow shopper was quoted more than our birthday shopper or pushed towards buying an expensive package.

Our advice is to ask for detailed breakdowns of quotes and to refuse to pay for services that you don't think you'll use. Extra costs are fair enough if you're receiving extra services, but you should only pay for the services you want.

Alan Kirkland, CEO
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For general membership & consumer enquiries, phone 1800 069 552

CHOICE

CHOICE gives you the power to choose the best goods and services, and avoid the worst. We pay full price for the products we test, so remain 100% independent. We don't take advertising or freebies from industry. We're not a government body and our consumer publishing and advocacy is almost entirely funded by subscriptions to our magazines, **choice.com.au** and from other services we supply to benefit members and consumers. CHOICE product ratings are based on lab tests, expert assessments and consumer surveys. CHOICE staff also research a wide range of consumer services. They reveal the truth behind the facts and figures, and investigate the quality and the claims. **SUBSCRIBE** To review the full range of membership benefits available to you, go to **choice.com.au/signup** and compare all our options for providing you access to our premium content across our website, mobile, tablet and print products. **SUBSCRIPTIONS/RENEWALS** Call 1800 069 552 or email us at **ausconsumer@choice.com.au**

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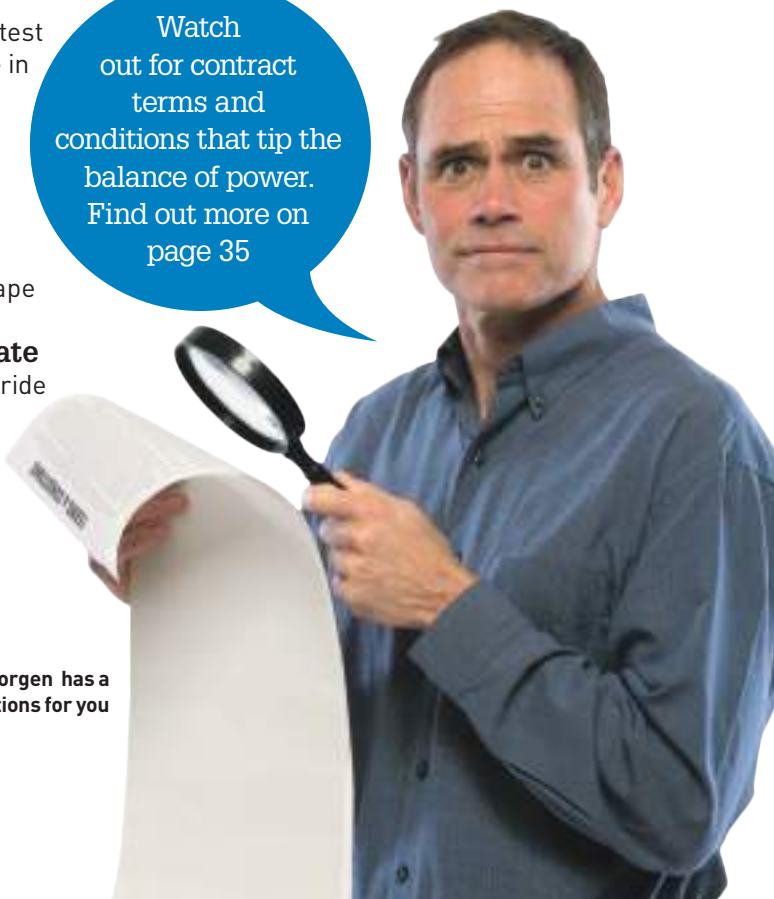
Watch out for contract terms and conditions that tip the balance of power. Find out more on page 35



Andy Kollmorgen has a few conditions for you

Fruit and veg target of five a day ideal

New research suggests that five a day is the appropriate target for the number of fruit and vegetable serves we eat, echoing the World Health Organization recommendation that dates back to 2003.

A review published in the *British Medical Journal* found higher consumption of fruit and vegetables was significantly associated with a lower risk of dying from any cause, but eating more than five serves a day had no further impact.

Researchers based in China and the US examined the association between fruit and veg intake and risk of all-cause, cardiovascular and cancer deaths. They analysed the results of 16 studies involving a total of 833,234 people. Over the period of the studies, 56,423 participants died.

They found that each additional daily serving of fruit and vegetables reduced the average risk of premature death from all causes by five per cent. In the case of death from cardiovascular disease, each additional serving curbed risk by four per cent. There was no appreciable association between a high consumption of fruit and veg and risk of death from cancer.

But the review reported a threshold of around five servings of fruit and veg a day, after which the risk of dying from any cause didn't reduce further.

The most recent Australian Health Survey found that 54% of the population met the recommended daily intake of fruit, which for adults is two serves according to the *Australian Dietary Guidelines*. Just 6.8% of the population met the recommended usual intake of vegetables, which for adults is five to six serves daily.

So while the daily target could be debated, the message for the public is still that we should be eating more fruit and particularly veg.

RACHEL CLEMONS

Counterfeit sportswear seized in NSW

New South Wales Fair Trading recently raided a Western Sydney retail outlet, seizing about 1000 items of fake designer clothing, including counterfeit Nike shoes. It's the latest in a series of Fair Trading raids in the Sydney area targeting counterfeit goods.

Counterfeit cosmetics have also been seized recently, following consumer complaints about make-up products they'd purchased, including one woman whose face was burnt by fake MAC foundation.

ANDY KOLLMORGEN

Child labour allegations hit Samsung

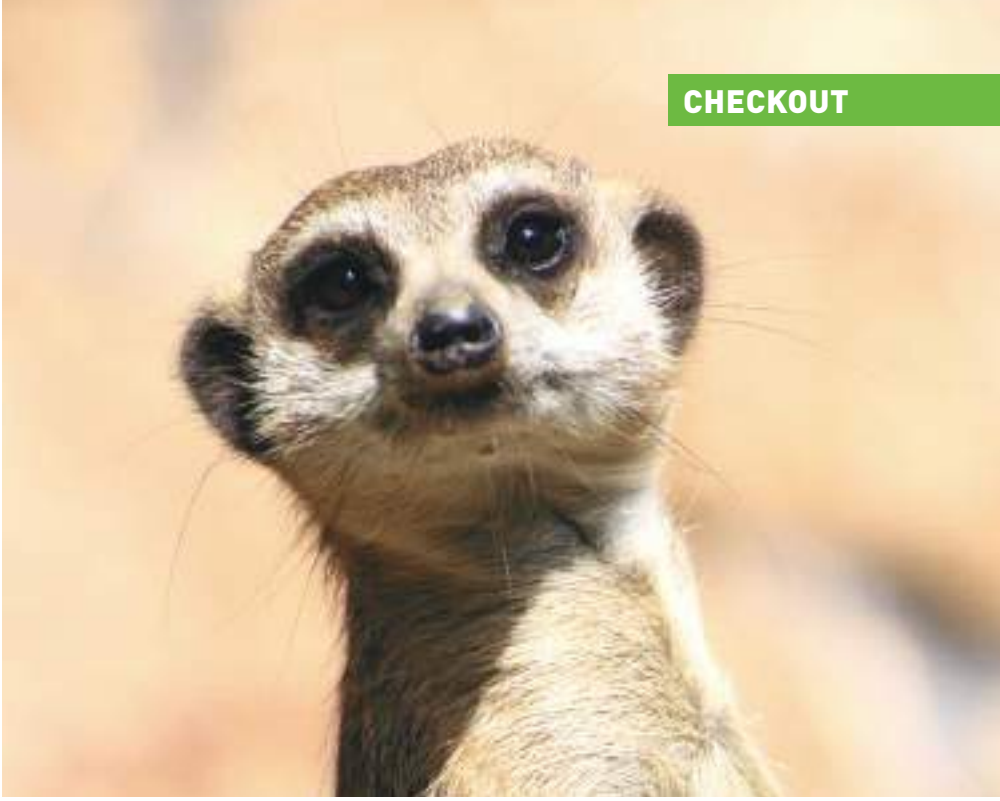
Samsung has suspended business with a factory in China while it investigates reports that children are being used on the assembly line.

An undercover investigation by China Labor Watch (CLW) allegedly discovered at least three underage girls working an 11-hour night shift at the Dongguan Shinyang Electronics factory in Guangdong province, making mobile phone parts for Samsung. In a report released earlier this month, the New York-based NGO said there were other violations in overtime pay and at least two other assembly line workers younger than 16, which is the legal working age in China.

In response to the CLW report, Samsung undertook a preliminary investigation that found evidence of suspected child labour at the factory. This is despite three Samsung audits over the past year that did not uncover child labour. CLW executive director Li Qiang says Samsung's audits are "ineffective" and designed to "appease investors and do not have any real value for workers".

Samsung has committed to permanently severing ties with the business if investigations confirm it has hired children.

RACHEL HYNES



CHOICE piracy campaign ahoy

CHOICE has stepped up calls for the federal government to ditch ineffective anti-piracy policies like the internet filter, which won't reduce piracy but will make the internet more expensive for everyone, as costs for the system are likely passed on to consumers. On 1 September we launched a new TV ad explaining why we oppose the filter.

CHOICE wants the government to address the big issues: the high cost and lack of availability of digital content in Australia, which we believe are the underlying cause of piracy in this country.

Australians pay up to 50% more than people in other countries for software and digitally distributed products such as music and movies, according to the recent IT Pricing Inquiry report.

In the meantime, Aussies are clearly not happy about paying more for technology and digital media. A survey of nearly 1200 Australians by Essential Media Communications found 79% of people are concerned about extra costs and 58% aren't happy about movies and television shows being legally released online overseas, but not here.

CHOICE wants the government to work smart, not hard, to solve internet piracy. Watch the ad and join our campaign at choice.com.au/smartnothard

PETER ZALUZNY and ERIN TURNER

IMAGES: THINKSTOCK & SHUTTERSTOCK

Compare the Market fined for false advertising

Comparison website Compare the Market, famous for its meerkat "salesman", has been fined $10,200 by the ACCC for falsely claiming in its advertising that it "compare[s] more health funds than anywhere else".

Between March and May this year, Compare the Market filled household letterboxes in Queensland, NSW and Victoria with pamphlets stating "we now compare more health funds than any other website in Australia". It also made similar false claims on its website and in TV infomercials.

In fact, Compare the Market compares a third of the private health insurance funds. The ACCC found that two other websites compare more policies, including the government-operated privatehealth.gov.au, which compares over 25,000 policies from all health funds.

A CHOICE investigation found that when it comes to car insurance Compare the Market compares several of its sister organisation's insurance brands on its website. Its parent company Budget Holdings Limited (BHL) also owns insurance giant Auto and General, encompassing car insurer Budget Direct. And Budget Direct, along with several other Auto and General insurance brands, are listed on the Compare the Market website.

It's not the first time insurance comparison websites have found themselves in hot water with the ACCC. iSelect gave the ACCC a court-enforceable undertaking in 2007 that it would cease claiming to compare a significant proportion of available insurance policies. Then in 2011, iSelect again gave a court-enforceable undertaking, this time as part of a court-ordered mediation with Bupa, to stop claiming that it compares "most" or a "wide range" of health insurance products. iSelect has only nine out of 36 health funds listed on its website for comparison.

In comparing health insurers, CHOICE obtains an extract of the data used on privatehealth.gov.au and analyses over 25,000 health insurance policies, assigning them a percentage score based on how well the policies compare against their competitors. We then publish only the best private health insurance policies. **JODI BIRD**

CHOICE cost of living report highlights tough times

New research by CHOICE reveals that the bulk of Australian consumers are seriously concerned about increased cost of living pressures, with electricity, fuel, food and health topping the list

In a national survey of over 1000 Australians across the demographic spectrum, 48% said their bills had increased a lot over the past 12 months, while 41% said their bills were "a little" higher. Strikingly, 31% reported they're finding it difficult to get by on their current income, and 62% reported cutting back on non-essentials like entertainment, holidays and big purchases.

Forty-four per cent indicated they were making ends meet, while only 18% said they were living "comfortably" and 5% said they were living "very comfortably".

Cause for concern

The three biggest financial worries for Australians are electricity (topping the list, with 84% of people surveyed citing this as a worry), fuel (81%) and food (77%). Pharmaceutical and GP costs are also causing financial distress, with 68% and 65% of respondents saying these are concerns.

"Almost one in three respondents told us they find it difficult to get by on their current income, with one in five saying they've scraped through to payday by living off credit or borrowing from friends or family," says CHOICE CEO Alan Kirkland. "This reveals some striking concerns with cost-of-living, which is perhaps not surprising when inflation is outstripping sluggish wages growth, retail sales are fragile and the political debate remains focused on household expenses."

Cuts to assistance

The widespread worry comes against a backdrop of decreasing government support, so it's probably no coincidence that government spending cuts were the number one issue, with 37% saying they were "very worried" about diminishing commitments from government.

Getting by has meant dipping into savings to make it to the next payday for 35% of people surveyed; 22% said they had deliberately missed or delayed paying a bill due to lack of funds, and 46% said they've cut back on essentials in the last year.

Renters in particular are in a tight spot. Nearly half (45%) are finding it difficult to get by as opposed to 25% of mortgage holders. City dwellers are faring better than regional Australians.

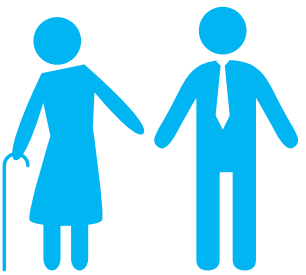
When asked about household expenses, electricity prices were the most concerning for Australians living "comfortably", as well as those finding it hard to get by.

31%

reported they are finding it difficult to get by on their current income

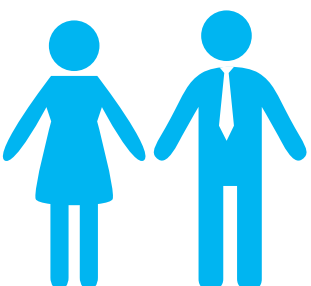
Hard-hit retirees

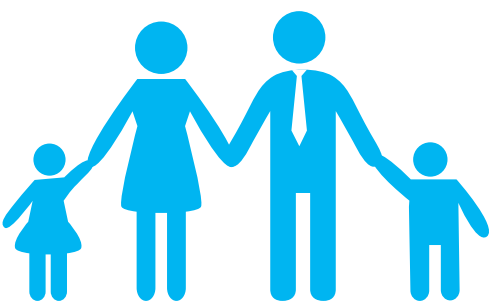
Retirees are feeling the pinch when it comes to paying the bills, with 55% of retired people reporting their bills have gone up. Electricity, fuel and groceries costs are causing the most concern of all household expenses, while meeting the mortgage or paying the rent is less of a burden. In general, retirees are less worried about their financial position than younger generations. They're also less worried about their level of savings, super and debt than the average Australian. Even so, slightly less than a third of retirees (31%) say they're finding it hard to get by – a significantly higher proportion than full-time workers (20%).



Despite the potential for higher medical costs, our survey found that retirees were no more concerned than the average Australian, and less concerned than families with school-aged children with medical costs. But it's worth noting that the survey took place before the GP co-payment and other new medical imposts on seniors proposed in the Federal Budget could make it through Parliament.

ANDY KOLLMORGEN





choice Pulse Check

National Findings 2014

Australians are feeling their bills increasing

A lot 48%
A little 41%
No change 8%

Australia's biggest cost concerns

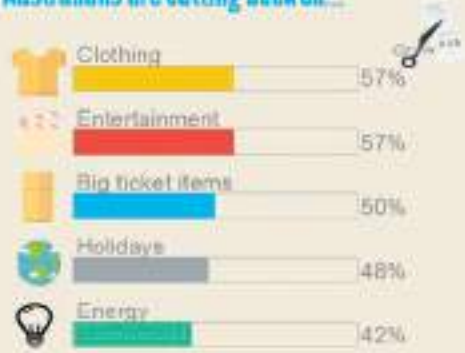
31% are finding it difficult to get by on current income

Finding it very difficult (11%) Finding it difficult (21%)
Getting by (44%) Living comfortably (18%)
Living very comfortably (5%)

In the last 12 months Australian households have...

Cut back on non-essentials Cut back on essentials
Delayed a major expense / purchase of an expensive item
Dipped into savings to cover the gap until payday
Deliberately missed or delayed paying a bill

Australians are cutting back on...



Australians think the economy is...

Very good (4%) Fairly good (27%)
Neither good nor poor (37%) Fairly poor (20%)
Very poor (8%) Don't know (4%)

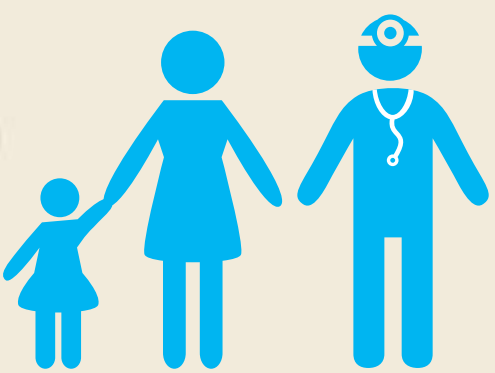
Australians are worried about...

Government spending cuts (Very worried=37%)
The level of savings and investments (Very worried=28%)
The value of their superannuation (Very worried=20%)
Interest rates (Very worried=17%)
The level of debt (Very worried=19%)
You or your partner losing your job (Very worried=20%)

Overall essential services concerns

Cost of Medicine - 68%
GP Costs - 65%
Quality of aged care - 48%
Cost of public transport - 43%
Uni Fees - 38%
Childcare fees - 29%

84% of students are concerned about uni fees
54% of Gen Ys are concerned about the cost of public transport
47% of parents are concerned about childcare fees, especially those who have kids aged under 5 (67%)



Apple launches buy-back program

Apple has launched its "Reuse and Recycle" trade-in program in all 21 of its stores in Australia, giving customers up to $250 of store credit for their old iPhones and iPads.

Under the program, trading in an iPhone can net you up to $250, while older iPads can earn up to $215. However, only a handful of devices are eligible at the moment. Apple stores will only recycle the iPhone 4, iPhone 4S, iPhone 5, and iPads released after and including the iPad 2. The original iPad and iPhones released before the iPhone 4 (e.g. the iPhone 3GS), as well as the latest models including the iPhone 5S, 5C and the iPad Air, won't be accepted. Any credit received from the scheme can only go towards the current generation of iPhones and iPads.

PETER ZALUZNY

Breath of fresh air on smoking rates

It seems Australia's pioneering anti-smoking measures are having their desired effect, with fewer Australians smoking, fewer cigarettes being smoked weekly per smoker, and young people taking up smoking later.

The 2013 National Drug Strategy Household Survey, conducted by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW), has found that fewer Australians are smoking daily, with the rate dropping significantly between 2010 and 2013, from 15.1% to 12.8% among people 14 or older. And the good news doesn't end there – the daily smoking rate has almost halved since 1991.

The average number of cigarettes smoked per week has also fallen, with smokers reducing their consumption from 111 cigarettes in 2010 to 96 cigarettes in 2013.

Not only is smoking on the decline overall, but young people specifically are making healthier choices. In the latest survey, 14 to 24-year-olds reported smoking their first full cigarette at 15.9 years of age, while in 1995 it was 14.2. And 95% of 12-17 year-olds and 77% of 18-24 year-olds have never smoked.

ZOYA SHEFTALOVICH

Industry super funds trump retail in best-of list

The best-performing superannuation funds have been named by research organisation SuperRatings, with only two retail super funds scraping into the list of top 20 balanced investment options for 2013-14.

Telstra Super, a corporate fund, performed best with growth in its balanced option of 15.8% in the year to 30 June 2014. This was followed by growth in the balanced options of Intrust Super of 14%, and UniSuper and AustralianSuper with 13.9%.

Plum's Pre-mixed Moderate investment option is the highest-performing retail fund at 17 on the list, with growth of 12.9%.

Telstra Super also topped the list of balanced options over the past five years, growth investment options in 2013-14 and Australian share investment options in 2013-14. The SuperRating lists of top performers are all dominated by industry super funds such as REST and AustralianSuper, although AMP SignatureSuper was the top performer in the international share investment options with 22.7% growth.

Based on SuperRatings' index of the top 50 largest balanced options, over the 10 years to 2014, a $100,000 investment with no further contributions would have grown almost 90% higher, to $189,816. Although the investment would have fallen 25% during the GFC, funds have since recovered with 65% growth. In contrast, a member with $100,000 invested in a cash option would have $150,006 today.

SuperRatings reports equities are the key driver of fund returns but the fund managers struggled to keep pace with market indexes. Australian shares had median growth of 16.8%, compared to growth in the benchmark S&P/ASX200 Accumulation Index of 17.4% and international shares median growth rate was 17.6% compared to 20.7% for the MSCI World Accumulation Index in the same period.

JODI BIRD

CHOICE to establish consumer voice in travel industry

Following the deregulation of travel agents, CHOICE has reached agreement with state and territory governments for a new Consumer Travel Hub project.

The project will provide a mix of research, tailored information, education campaigns and advocacy to significantly improve the experience of Australian consumers in the travel market. With a planned launch date of late 2014, the hub will identify issues with travel providers, products and services, and bring these issues to the attention of governments, regulators and industry.

CHOICE reached agreement with state and territory ministers in July, with the project to receive funding of $2.8m over four-and-a-half years, provided from the now-defunct Travel Compensation Fund. This matches the funding already provided to the Australian Federation of Travel Agents to set up a voluntary self-accreditation scheme from 1 July 2014. Funding has also been provided to state and territory governments to raise awareness about the changes to the travel industry. Key features of the CHOICE proposal are:

- ensuring there is a strong consumer voice in the Australian travel market, identifying emerging consumer issues, and advocating for solutions
- publishing and promoting independent advice for Australian travellers on their consumer rights and protections, including common issues around travel agents and other providers
- providing unbiased reviews and how-to guides for navigating consumer travel products and services, including travel insurance.

CHOICE was one of several groups invited by the nation's consumer affairs ministers to apply for funding to establish a consumer voice in the travel industry. This followed the decision by the ministers to abolish the Travel Compensation Fund, which since 1987 was part of licensing arrangements for Australian-based travel agents. The fund also paid more than $60m in compensation to consumers left high and dry when agents went bust, such as when a Sydney-based cruise company went into administration in 2012.

While we recognise the travel industry is evolving, CHOICE advocated for reforming the fund rather than abolishing it. We also argued that if the fund were abolished, dedicated resources should be provided for consumer protection.

When ministers decided to abolish the fund anyway, and to provide funding to the travel industry to set up a voluntary self-accreditation scheme, we argued that a comparable amount should be provided to help consumers. **MADISON CARTWRIGHT**

Tax scams on the rise and getting trickier

The ATO and the ACCC are warning consumers not to fall for the latest outbreak of phone and email scammers who pose as government officials during tax filing time. Since the beginning of the year, $300,000 has been lost to crooks posing as bureaucrats.

"These fraudsters contact you out of the blue, claiming you have overpaid your tax and are now entitled to a refund. To obtain the refund, they ask you to first pay an administration or transfer fee. They may also ask for your financial details so they can transfer your refund to you," ACCC acting chair Delia Rickard said.

There has also been an increase in reported email phishing scams – 11,344 since 1 March 2014 as compared to 9368 during the same period last year.

How do you know if you're being targeted for a scam? Simple. Government agencies occasionally send emails and SMS messages, but they never ask for money upfront in return for a refund.

ANDY KOLLMORGEN

IMAGES: SHUTTERSTOCK

Action taken on unsafe cots

Two online retailers have agreed to court-enforceable undertakings after testing obtained by the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) identified the baby cots they sold as being a safety risk.

The risk assessment found that with both designs an infant may fall out of the cot, suffocate or become trapped. As a result, two online traders have paid infringement notices and provided undertakings to the ACCC after admitting that the cots they were selling didn't comply with the mandatory safety standard.

The retailers are New Aim Pty Ltd, trading as "OzPlaza Living", which sold the "Wooden Sleigh 3-in-1 Baby Cot" through its eBay store between June and September 2013, and Le Tian, trading as "SavingForAussie", which sold the "Canterbury Cot" through its eBay store between May and September 2013. The retailers are offering refunds and free collection of affected cots. **KATE BROWNE**

Blend and drink – with one bottle

The Kambrook Blitz2Go lets you blend smoothies, juices and shakes in a removable container that doubles as a drinking bottle. You add ingredients to one of the supplied 600mL or 300mL bottles, screw on the blade assembly, slot the whole thing on to the motorised unit and blitz away. Unlike regular blenders, the unit isn't intended for heavy-duty jobs. It only comes with a pulse action (which delivers one-touch, intermittent bursts of power) and the instructions warn that it should only be used for 30 seconds at a time. With these caveats in mind, how well does it really work?

Performance

Fiona Mair, home economist from CHOICE's test kitchen, threw a variety of foods at the Blitz2Go and found it was very good at blending most ingredients you'd want in a drink. Food is blended to a smooth texture, which can be thick or thin depending on the amount of liquid added. Fruits and vegetables result in a pleasingly pulpy juice, and it's great for frozen fruit. It can also process ice cubes mixed with a liquid.

On the downside, the Blitz2Go isn't good enough to blend nuts and seeds fully; we found that they left a gritty mouthfeel. Similarly, coarse foods like kale and cucumber skin aren't processed well.

Ease of use

The Blitz2Go is lightweight, sturdy, and easy to assemble and store. The narrow shape of the containers is a plus –they're designed to fit in most car cup holders. While it's easy to clean overall, we found the thin rubber seal on the blade assembly and on the bottles was difficult to remove for washing. It could be dangerous to remove the seal with your fingers due to its proximity to the blades. Replacing the seal was also fiddly.

CHOICE verdict

The Blitz2Go is very good overall, and does a great job of making juices and smoothies. The instruction booklet includes some simple recipes to get you started. It's a reasonably priced, decent alternative to some of the more powerful models on the market. But it has its limitations and doesn't rate higher due to its lack of versatility and performance compared with benchtop blenders, and the safety concerns we had removing the rubber seal.

KIM GILMOUR

KAMBROOK BLITZ2GO
PRICE $50
CONTACT kambrook.com.au

Hindus' beef with Heinz

Golden Circle, owned by Heinz Australia, has come under fire from the Hindu community after a consumer's enquiry revealed that beef products and alcohol are used in the production of its juices.

In response to the query, Heinz revealed that the Golden Circle long-life range was made using a clarifying agent derived from beef and that alcohol-based flavours were used across the drinks range.

In a statement to Fairfax Media, Heinz said: "Flavours, including alcohol-based flavours, are used across the Golden Circle and Original Juice Co. juice and drink ranges." A beef-derived gelatine was also used to remove "cloudiness" in its apple juice, although the final product did not contain gelatine.

Despite upsetting members of the Hindu community, the company is complying with regulatory standards. It's not mandatory for manufacturers to label gelatine when it's used as a processing aid, or to list ingredients of permitted flavours.

RACHEL CLEMONS

Rental complaints make NSW Fair Trading list

Complaints to NSW Fair Trading about tenancy issues have hit the top 10 list of grievances for the first time, taking out sixth place with 1522 complaints for the 2013-14 financial year. The number one complaint category was electrical, electronic, whitegoods and gas appliances, with 2537 complaints received.

The theme across all categories has been consistent from year to year, Fair Trading Minister Matthew Mason-Cox pointed out. "Consumer concerns about refunds, defective goods and unsatisfactory service continues to be a common trigger for complaints."

Top 10 complaints

1. Electrical, electronic, whitegoods and gas appliances (2537)
2. Used cars (2221)
3. Furniture, furnishings and manchester (2165)
4. Clothing, footwear, accessories and jewellery (2087)
5. House construction (1829)
6. Tenancy, bonds, residential parks (1522)
7. Automotive – repairs and maintenance (1514)
8. New cars (1338)
9. Travel and tourism (1291)
10. Mobiles and smartphones (937)

ANDY KOLLMORGEN

Pradaxa safety warnings withheld

Manufacturers of the blood-thinning stroke drug Pradaxa deliberately held back information on how to use the drug safely, an investigation by the *British Medical Journal* (BMJ) has found. Pradaxa has reportedly been linked to 280 deaths and 1400 adverse reactions such as abdominal bleeding, brain haemorrhages, strokes and heart attacks in Australia in the last five years.

The maker of the drug, Boehringer Ingelheim, a multinational headquartered in Germany, will fork out $US650m to settle about 4000 claims in state and federal court cases in the US.

According to the investigation, the drug has been recommended in the US, Europe and Canada based on marketing claims that it didn't require monitoring of plasma levels and adjusting of doses, unlike treatments such as warfarin. However, the BMJ says confidential documents released during litigation in the US show the manufacturer did not share information about the potential benefits of monitoring and adjusting the dose to ensure it's working safely. It also withheld analyses that calculated how many major bleeds dose adjustment could prevent.

But specialists warn patients to not stop taking Pradaxa suddenly, because doing so could increase the risk of stroke. People with concerns should speak with their doctor.

JODI BIRD

IMAGES: THINKSTOCK & SHUTTERSTOCK

Kids' dental health a concern, warn experts

Nearly half of Australian parents say their children have experienced symptoms of tooth decay in the past year and a similar percentage of parents think cavities are inevitable for kids, according to a survey released by the Australian Dental Association (ADA).

According to the ADA the top cause of tooth decay is the consumption of sugary foods and drinks on a regular basis. Worryingly, according to the survey, 72% of Australian parents find it difficult to get their children to eat less sugary foods, while 33% admit allowing their children to have soft drinks, fruit juice and energy drinks four or more times a week.

"This survey data is very concerning considering that tooth decay is the most common chronic disease for children, even though it is entirely preventable," Dr Peter Alldritt, chair of the ADA's Oral Health Committee, says.

Alldritt says that while it's unreasonable to expect parents to entirely cut out sugary foods and drinks, they do need to exercise more restraint. "No one is saying that your children should never be allowed to eat these foods again. Be aware of how much sugar is in these snacks, but more importantly, reduce the number of times they eat these foods, make sure they are eaten in one go and preferably as part of a meal. Grazing should be avoided."

ZOYA SHEFTALOVICH

Paracetamol no better than placebo for back pain

Paracetamol is no better than a placebo at speeding recovery from acute episodes of lower back pain, according to a large randomised trial carried out in Australia and published in leading medical journal *The Lancet*.

The study randomly allocated 1652 patients with acute lower back pain to receive either up to four weeks of paracetamol in regular doses (three times a day, equivalent to 3990mg per day), paracetamol as needed (maximum 4000mg per day), or a placebo. The study revealed no statistical difference in recovery time from an episode of lower back pain between the treatment groups.

Paracetamol also had no effect on short-term pain levels, disability, function, sleep quality, or quality of life.

The number of participants reporting adverse events was similar between the groups.

"The results suggest we need to reconsider the universal recommendation to provide paracetamol as a first-line treatment for lower back pain," says lead author Dr Christopher Williams from The George Institute for Global Health at the University of Sydney.

According to senior author Associate Professor Christine Lin, also of The George Institute, sufferers of acute back pain should remain as active as possible and avoid bed rest. "An active approach is probably more important than any therapy [a person] may receive. Heat wraps and heat packs are simple methods that the person can use to help with their pain."

RACHEL CLEMONS

Not good enough: Medicines Australia Code of Conduct

CHOICE and other consumer advocates are concerned that a new code of conduct from Medicines Australia (MA) fails to address transparency of transactions between drug companies and medical professionals – a major issue affecting consumers.

MA, which is the main peak body representing pharmaceutical companies, submitted the 18th edition of its code of conduct to the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) for approval, ignoring calls for an easily searchable database of the type and value of gifts provided by drug companies to doctors.

If a doctor prescribes a medicine or device (such as an implant or prosthesis), CHOICE believes it's important consumers are aware of any factors that may influence this decision. Psychological studies have shown that receiving even small gifts drives recipients to reciprocate.

Consumer advocate Dr Ken Harvey established a petition in 2012, signed by more than 450 people and organisations (including CHOICE), in favour of better transparency around payments to individual healthcare professionals. The petition argued that the comprehensive disclosure of payments to health professionals by the pharmaceutical industry should be included in the Medicines Australia Code of Conduct.

Although the demands weren't met, the ACCC limited its authorisation of the 17th edition of the code of conduct to two years rather than the five sought, with a view to improving transparency provisions in the 18th edition.

While MA has cracked down on small gifts, the proposed system of disclosure, as spelled out in the 18th code, will be self-regulated by the industry and allow doctors to opt out. Doctors who feel their independence could be considered compromised by gifts may consider opting out of disclosure.

CHOICE previously investigated drug company-sponsored gifts (see *CHOICE*, Apr 14 or **choice.com.au/corporatesponsorship**) such as pens, computers, speaking and advisory board fees, dinners or travel to exotic locations for conferences. These gifts are often part of the information dissemination process, where companies inform medical professionals about their latest products.

KARINA BRAY

A2 milk less likely to cause gastro problems

New research funded by a2 Dairy Products Australia suggests that consuming A1 milk may adversely affect the gastrointestinal tract compared with A2 milk.

Forty-one people were recruited into the double-blind, randomised cross-over study run by Curtin University in Perth over eight weeks. The pilot study found those drinking A1 milk had looser stools than those drinking A2 milk, and that this was positively associated with abdominal pain. When self-reporting digestive discomfort, A1 milk drinkers recorded a 61% higher bloating score, a 38% higher score for abdominal pain and 86% higher score for "voiding difficulty" compared with A2 milk drinkers, however, none of these measures was statistically significant.

The study is the first human trial to evaluate the impact of A1 and A2 proteins on the digestive system. The results suggest differences in gastrointestinal responses in some people consuming A1 or A2 milk, but the study has its limitations.

Regular milk naturally contains both A1 and A2 proteins. While A2 milk is available to consumers, purely A1 milk is not, so it's uncertain whether regular milk would cause similar digestive symptoms. Ultimately, more research is needed in a bigger sample size, including a substantial number of people with perceived intolerance to regular milk.

RACHEL CLEMONS

IMAGES: SHUTTERSTOCK

Your Say

We want to hear from you. If you've had a bad experience, been ripped off or scammed, tell us and help other CHOICE members avoid the same traps. If you've had a great response to a complaint you've taken to a manufacturer or retailer, our members want to know about that too! Letters may be edited for length and clarity, and we regret that we cannot reply to all correspondence.

Contact us!

Email us at **yoursay@choice.com.au** or write to Your Say, CHOICE, 57 Carrington Road, Marrickville, NSW 2204.

Due diligence

It seems that Telstra charges a $15 late payment fee on billing periods that customers extend. For example, when I asked to extend the due date of my bill by a fortnight, I was told I'd be charged $15 for "late payment". I told Telstra that I didn't agree that the payment would be late since they'd agreed to a new due date. But I was informed the extension was for the "privilege of not cancelling my service" and that my payment by the new date would be considered late. How is this a fair charge to consumers?

Amy Evans, Renmark, SA

CHOICE SAYS *Amy's done the right thing by contacting Telstra to arrange an extension, yet they decided to charge a late fee anyway. We think that's unfair. The justification for imposing late fees is often that there are administrative and other charges involved when payments are late. However, in this case, Amy notified them first and they apparently agreed to the extension, so there seems to be no reason to charge a late fee. Amy made complaints to Telstra and the ombudsman, though the former wouldn't budge on the fee and the ombudsman couldn't help until the fee had been charged. She ended up paying the bill by the original date to avoid the fee. But we can't help but wonder why Telstra customers should bother arranging a new date if the fee's charged either way.*

Dyeing to know

Regarding your June magazine item "Chemicals in clothing recall", how does one know whether the fabric has been dyed with "azo" dyes, as it is not written on the garment? What is clearly labelled are the washing instructions and fabric composition, but no information about dyes.

Doreen Sloan, Attadale, WA

CHOICE SAYS *True, not everything that's "in" a garment is on the label, and CHOICE agrees with retail representatives and legislators who advocate for stronger government regulation of azo dyes. While only a small proportion of these dyes are hazardous, and suppliers must ensure their products are safe, there have been problems in the past* (CHOICE, *Jun 12). The ACCC carries out checks to ensure goods containing azo dyes are below the maximum acceptable level of concentration, with a 97% compliance rate. If you have a reaction to an item, report it to the ACCC.*

Thumbs

I recently bought my partner a laptop from Dick Smith for his birthday. After following all the prompts and setting up his email and Wi-Fi, I couldn't work out why the keyboard wasn't making the correct symbols or numbers when pressed. We took the laptop back to the Dick Smith store at Highpoint, thinking there was something wrong with the machine and expecting a replacement. A young man named Sam reconfigured - and gave both of us a lesson on - the operating system it uses. Great service and a massive thumbs up.

Caroline Sanders, Ascot Vale, Vic

I've subscribed to your magazine for many years and recently I've seen several letters critical of Dyson for their after-sales support. I recently needed to have my two-year-old Dyson vacuum serviced for a faulty power head. Without my having to produce proof of purchase, Dyson arranged to have the cleaner picked up, repaired and returned to me, all free of charge. The courier was even at my front door the day after I contacted Dyson. I could not fault this support and I'm impressed at the way this manufacturer stands by its products.

Ashley Kaar, Coal Point, NSW

IMAGE: SHUTTERSTOCK

Solar heating just isn't cool

LETTER OF THE MONTH

We had a rooftop solar hot water system installed in our house in Brisbane last spring. It has an electric booster controlled by a manual switch. We were told by the manufacturer that the booster would not normally be required and should be left switched off year round, unless there were several successive overcast days.

While this worked OK in summer, it has proved to be totally unacceptable since. The water is warm at best, and often cold. We measured it at just 28°C at the tap one morning after several fine but cool days.

I've complained to the company several times both by phone and email, but so far they have done nothing. We're currently running the booster for a few hours every night. Apart from being inconvenient, this will use far more power than we originally envisaged. In fact, we may have been better off financially to stay with our off-peak electric hot water system, given the initial cost of the solar system.

But this problem has raised a far more important issue. There's an Australian standard that requires stored hot water to be regularly heated to above 60°C to prevent the growth of harmful bacteria. This is clearly not happening in our case unless the booster is left on, contrary to the maker's advice. Some manufacturers supply an automatic timer to ensure the water is regularly heated to this level, but this one doesn't.

Our system, operated as per the manufacturer's instructions, would appear to be a health hazard

So our system, operated as per the manufacturer's instructions, would appear to be a health hazard. Are these standards not mandatory, and if not, why not?

Ken Thompson
Mount Crosby, Qld

CHOICE SAYS *Hot water systems are regulated and generally must provide hot water at or near 60 °C. If the system does not automatically do this, it's either faulty or has been designed without regard to the regulations. The best course of action is to report this to the Office of Fair Trading in Queensland and the Energy and Water Ombudsman Queensland.* ■

I picked myself up a few sachets of Only Organic Minted Peas, Blackcurrant & Lamb baby food recently for my toddler. Come feed time I tasted a bit – it tasted and looked like sweet potato. I thought it was a packaging error until I read the ingredients: sweet potato and carrot listed first, and just 8% peas, 6% lamb, 1% blackcurrant, and 0.01% mint. They should have been written in the "Contains traces of…." section. It's like ordering a tiramisu and getting a small teaspoonful of it served in a big bowl of porridge.

Paddy O'Donnell, via email

Here comes the bride, up goes the price

Are consumers still being charged more as soon as they say the word "wedding"? **Kate Browne** investigates

With the average price of an Australian wedding estimated at between $36,200 and $54,000, it seems the institution is immune to financial crises and just about everything else. But are Aussie couples planning to tie the knot paying a price premium? Can just saying the W word mean paying through the nose when it comes to venues, photographers, cakes, hire cars and so on?

In 2009 CHOICE put this theory to the test and, sure enough, we found many wedding suppliers and venues charge more for people having a wedding than someone just having a party – despite exactly the same product or service being requested.

Five years later, we decided to put the wedding industry under the spotlight again to see if anything has changed.

The CHOICE shadow shop

CHOICE commissioned two shadow shoppers to organise quotes for a wedding and a birthday. Both events had the same number of guests and identical requirements.

Our wedding shadow shopper called the businesses first. A week later, the second shopper called the same businesses with an identical request but claimed it was for her partner's 40th birthday.

Our shadow shop focused on:

- venue hire (including catering)
- photography
- hire cars
- cake
- flowers
- photo booth hire.

Businesses were selected in both Melbourne and Sydney to provide a good cross-section of suburbs and demographics. Our two shadow shoppers contacted 36 businesses in total across both cities and each was contacted twice, once by our bride and once by the party planner.

- Florists were asked to provide quotes on flowers to decorate the venue only – no bridal bouquets were requested.
- The photographer was told they were only needed for the reception and not the ceremony, as this was being done by a friend.
- For the cake, flowers, photo booth and car enquiries, the birthday shopper used the same details as for the wedding scenario.
- For the venue, our shadow shoppers requested quotes for a three-course sit-down meal, with drinks, for 80 people.

$188 Quote for 3-course meal for a wedding

$144 Quote for 3-course meal for a party at the same venue

What we found

Venues

Whether you're having a party or a wedding, the venue (which often includes the catering too) will be one of the most expensive elements of your event.

Our shadow shop found three of the six venues contacted for quotes charged more for the wedding than the party, despite having identical requirements.

One venue told our wedding shopper that they didn't charge per person for weddings and that the cost would be between $12,000-18,000 in total. However, they happily prepared a per-head charge for our birthday shopper of $125 per person for a five-hour, sit-down three-course package, including drinks, venue hire and the cutting and serving of a provided cake!

Another issue for our party planner was that one venue told her they don't accept bookings for any kind of function other than a wedding on Saturday nights, while another told her she would have to pay "wedding prices" if she wanted to secure a Saturday.

And when it comes to wedding planning, watch out for add-ons. Megan West, a NSW-based marriage celebrant, says this is a trap for excited couples planning their day – one she's seen quite often.

"I see suppliers all the time quote a base cost that actually works within the bride and groom's budget," she says. "Then the supplier later adds on extra costs. This pretty much entraps them.

"If they don't pay up, it won't be the wedding they've been told they want. It's pretty standard practice."

Hot tip: Venues often want you to come in for a meeting to discuss your needs one-on-one. While this is great for getting a feel for what the venue is like, beware any upselling of added extras.

Photographers

Professional photographers have a tough gig, especially when it comes to weddings. Clients want their photos to be perfect, and woe betide the photographer who forgets to get that crucial shot of great-aunt Esme in the rush to capture everyone else on the big day.

When it comes to weddings, many photographers work on the premise of a five-hour job, which usually includes shots of the bride and groom getting ready, the service and the festivities afterwards, as well as some formal posed shots with the wedding party and the family.

Our wedding shadow shopper was very specific about the fact that she was having a very informal wedding, a close family friend would be capturing the ceremony (which was happening away from the venue) and that a photographer was only required at the reception to capture the festivities and some semi-formal photos of friends and family with the bride and groom. This was so our shadow shoppers could compare apples with apples – our party planner requested a photographer for two hours to take a variety of informal shots at the party as well as some informal shots of friends and family with the birthday boy.

IMAGE: SHUTTERSTOCK

Quote: photography for birthday party =

$1495

Quote: wedding photography =

$4750

The response from the photographic businesses our shoppers contacted was very mixed. Two photographers told them both that they would not accept a booking for just two hours; another was perfectly happy to quote $400 to the bride without a confirmed venue, yet told the party girl he wouldn't provide a quote until she confirmed the venue.

One upmarket photographer in Sydney quoted our party girl $1495, yet quoted our bride-to-be $4750 for a full package for five hours, despite her repeatedly stating that she only needed someone for two hours. She also received an emotional hard sell, being told that "this is the most amazing day of your life – we capture that emotion, we tell that story. You can go back and relive the whole day through the photos".

Hot tip: As with venues, wedding photography packages can be fairly inflexible and often priced at a minimum of four or five hours with a one-size-fits-all approach. If that's not what you want, be prepared to shop around and be very clear what your expectations are.

Flowers

Not surprisingly, a wedding is usually going to have different floral requirements to a birthday party.

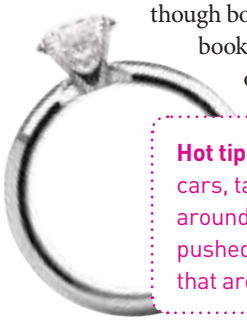
Our wedding shadow shopper requested flowers only to decorate the venue, saying that a family friend was going to make her bouquet. When she called a week later, our birthday planner asked specifically for the same flowers that had been suggested by the florist to the bride.

Of the six florists contacted, none quoted more for our bride or party planner. However, one florist, possibly looking for an opportunity to upsell our bride-to-be, refused to do a quote over the phone and insisted she come in for a one-on-one consultation, yet was able to provide a quote for our party person.

Hire cars

When it comes to a hire car, you could fairly assume that the job would be the same no matter who's travelling in it. However, we found this isn't always the case.

Our shadow shoppers requested the same style of car and only a pick-up from and drop-off at the venue over the same distance. Interestingly, three of the six businesses contacted were only too happy to provide this service to our party planner and quote her an hourly rate, yet our bride-to-be was told by the same businesses that there was a minimum call-out of three hours. As a result she was quoted $1000 by a provider who quoted our party person just $450 for a one-hour call-out, even though both customers asked for a booking for the same location on the same date.



Hot tip: When it comes to hire cars, take the time to shop around, especially if you're pushed into minimum call-outs that aren't required.

Cakes

The prices for cakes quoted to our shadow shoppers ranged from $200 to $700, depending on the store and the size of serving. Both requested a modern-style, white chocolate mud cake, decorated with fresh flowers and big enough to feed 80 people.

While our bride-to-be was quoted more at two of the six stores we called, our birthday planner also got the upsell from one Sydney cake-maker, who suggested a different cake costing $1500 and suggested if that was too expensive, she could ask family and friends to "chip in"!

Hot tip: Most cake-makers offer the option of a "finger slice" of cake to have with coffee or as a "dessert serve". Serving your wedding cake as dessert could save you a bundle. If you're sure you don't want a traditional wedding cake, you don't need to let on that it's for a wedding – you may get a better deal.

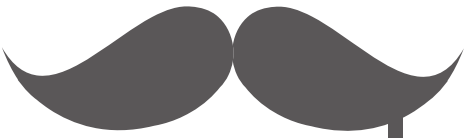


Photo booths

Photo booths can be a lot of fun for party or wedding guests and have become increasingly popular over the past few years.

Our shadow shoppers had identical requirements when they called for a quote and received identical prices in return, with the exception of one business who charged our wedding shopper an extra $50 on top of the $700 our party shopper was quoted.

Are brides *really* high maintenance?

Suppliers will argue that brides-to-be and their partners are "high maintenance" customers, with high expectations for service and quality of product – which may justify any price hike when the W word is mentioned. John O'Meara, chair of the Australian Bridal Industry Academy, argues that with about 40,000 wedding retailers in business in Australia, in a seasonal industry, many suppliers have to charge a premium. "I believe the premiums charged for a wedding are justified because it's predominantly weekend work and brides can be very high maintenance. There are higher expectations for a wedding than any other event. As a retailer you only get one chance to get it right."

But marriage celebrant West says she often sees couples being stung by high costs and hidden charges. "Reception venues will claim a wedding usually involves more work. I translate that into 'managing the behaviour of exuberant guests on the night'. Otherwise it's pretty absurd. The overheads are the same – grain-fed, free-range, organic Wagyu costs the same from the butcher whether it's used for Johnny and Dee's big day or Nanna's 90th." ■

IMAGE: SHUTTERSTOCK

A low blow

In many cases, a lowest-price guarantee isn't really guaranteeing the lowest price, as **Zoya Sheftalovich** discovers

From department stores such as Big W and David Jones to electrical retailers like Retravision and Harvey Norman, and countless others – including Dan Murphy's, Officeworks and Toys 'R Us – businesses are slapping "lowest price", "best price", or "price match" signs on their goods. This seems to be shorthand for "don't bother shopping around – we promise you'll get the best deal here". But should shoppers believe the glitzy promises, or is there more (or less) to a price guarantee than meets the eye?

Research from the University of East Anglia in the UK indicates lowest-price guarantees can actually work against consumers, potentially pushing prices up and discouraging them from shopping around. According to the researchers, "Price guarantees can stifle competition either by removing the incentives for rivals to compete on prices or removing the incentive of consumers to seek out lower prices. This will lead to higher prices and consumer detriment."

What we found

If CHOICE's own legwork is anything to go by, the researchers have a point.

When we shopped around at a number of retailers offering so-called best prices on their products, there were some interesting results. While liquor store Dan Murphy's was hard for us to beat on price, we found that in most other stores lowest- or best-price guarantees were not a guarantee of ▸

RETAILER	PRODUCT	THEIR BEST PRICE	COMPETITOR'S PRICE
BING LEE	**Electrolux** EWF12832 washing machine	$829	$799 (The Good Guys)
CHEMIST WAREHOUSE	**Rimmel** BB Cream Matte	$10.99	$6.47 (Priceline)
Harvey Norman	**Asus** UX32LA Ultrabook	$1296	$1127 (Retravision Online)
Officeworks	**Uniden** XDECTR055 cordless phone + 2 additional handsets	$327	$299 (Bing Lee)
RETRAVISION	**Philips** AquaTouch AT890 electric shaver	$99	$84 (Shaver Shop)
Toys"R"Us	**Target** Razor Power Rider 360	$299.99	$249 (Target)

*Online prices July 2014

a bargain. This isn't surprising, considering many retailers in the same sector boast about their lowest prices.

Tricky T&Cs

When you do find a cheaper price at a different store and want a competitor to honour it, you may find the process isn't as simple as you'd expect. Price guarantees are riddled with tricky terms and conditions, so it pays to always read the fine print. Most stores require that an item be in stock at the competitor's store before they'll agree to price match, but some actually specify much more restrictive terms and conditions (see table, right).

What the ACCC says

The ACCC doesn't take lowest-price guarantees lightly. Flight Centre was fined $11m earlier this year after the consumer watchdog took it to court for attempting to persuade airlines to stop offering airfares at lower prices so that they wouldn't lose money on their "lowest airfare guarantee".

When it comes to judging whether tricky terms and conditions are in breach of the Australian Consumer Law (ACL), ACCC deputy chair Dr Michael Schaper says it's a matter of the overall impression given to the consumer.

"If you're going to make a statement like 'lowest price guaranteed', you need to ask yourself what that's going to mean to the general person who reads that," says Schaper. "It's a pretty clear, unambiguous statement. If you're going to make that promise, you've got to honour it. That's what the ACL is about."

Schaper concedes businesses can have reasonable conditions regarding lowest-price guarantees, for example limiting the quantity of items available for sale. However, it's a question of how clearly those exclusions are outlined to consumers.

"Businesses can put an asterisk where terms and conditions apply. But they can't use the asterisk as an escape-all clause. They can't use it to contradict what they've said in a headline. They can make disclaimers, but they've got to make them clear to people."

Stand up for your rights

While many stores purport to match or beat competitors' prices, the reality can often be different from the expectation. Even in cases where all the price match guarantee criteria appear to be met, consumers report having issues with stores refusing to honour their promises.

Schaper told us that stores not ▸

Retravision Online claims:

"Lowest Price Guarantee: Retravision Online Guarantees to beat any advertised competitor price*"

However, if you follow the asterisk you'll find: "In some cases there are prices which Retravision Online cannot match. In these cases we will offer you the best possible price that we can." So it's not so much a lowest-price guarantee as it is a "we'll try, but no promises" disclaimer.

Toys 'R Us says:

"Our Prices Can't Be Beat! We'll Match ANY Advertised Price!*"

But, read their terms and conditions and you'll see that when they say they'll beat "any" price, they actually mean "some" prices. The promise comes with a very big caveat: they won't match a competitor's "category or storewide" discount, meaning if a rival is having a 20% off everything sale, or a special on all toys, they reserve the right not to honour the price promise.

Dan Murphy's says:

"At Dan Murphy's we pride ourselves on offering the Lowest Liquor Price Guarantee*. That means you can shop with confidence that when you buy from a Dan Murphy's store, you are receiving the lowest price. If anyone offers a lower price than us, show us and we'll beat it*!"

However, in their terms and conditions they state "Competitors' premises must be within 10km of our store." 1st Choice Liquor has similar messaging around their "Price Beat Guarantee", and an identical clause. So tough luck if you live in a one-liquor-store town – there'll be no price matching for you.

Price match breakdown

DEPARTMENT STORES

RETAILER	MATCH ONLINE ONLY STORES?	LOCATION REQUIREMENTS	TRICKY TERMS/EXCLUSIONS	GUARANTEE DETAILS
BIG W	✗	Not specified	• Excludes clearance, factory outlets, promotional sale prices	• "Match" price
DAVID JONES	✗	Australian retail stores and their online sites	• Excludes auctions, fire or liquidation sales, rack, clearance and warehouse outlets	• "Match" price
Kmart	✗	Australian retail stores	• Excludes clearance/ warehouse outlets	• "Match" price
MYER	✗	Australian retail stores and their online sites	• Won't sell below cost • Excludes duty free, factory outlets, member-only offers, warehouses, clearance centres, unauthorised reseller/grey/parallel importers (see *CHOICE*, Jun 12 or **choice.com.au/parallelimports**) • Myer physical stores won't match their own "online only" or below cost offers on their website myer.com.au	• "Match" price • No further promotional offers, e.g. bonus gift cards or gift with purchase

ELECTRICAL RETAILERS

RETAILER	MATCH ONLINE ONLY STORES?	LOCATION REQUIREMENTS	TRICKY TERMS/EXCLUSIONS	GUARANTEE DETAILS
BING LEE	✗	Registered Australian business with physical store	• Excludes competitor's clearance lines, liquidation sales, limited stock offers and grey/parallel imports	• "Match" price
dick smith	✗	Must be in same metro or town area	• Won't sell below cost • Excludes clearance/limited stock offers, member-only deals	• "Match" price within seven days of purchase
Harvey Norman	✗	Stores in the relevant franchisee's local retail market	• Excludes cash back, bonus offers, trade discount, third-party promotions, clearance/limited quantity promotion, commercial resellers/distributors, grey/parallel imports, liquidation sales, rack/clearance/warehouse outlets • Price must be available to general public	• "Beat" price within seven days of purchase
RETRAVISION	Not specified	Not specified	• May refuse to honour price match at their discretion • Excludes member-only deals, auctions, grey imports and wholesale distributors	• "Beat" price
THE GOOD GUYS	✓	Must be authorised dealer in Australia	• Item must be available for immediate shipment • Excludes bonus offers, limited or minimum quantity offers, clearance, and finance offers	• Find a cheaper price within 30 days, and they'll refund 120% of the difference

HARDWARE STORES

RETAILER	MATCH ONLINE ONLY STORES?	LOCATION REQUIREMENTS	TRICKY TERMS/EXCLUSIONS	GUARANTEE DETAILS
BUNNINGS warehouse	✓	Australian online and retail stores	• Excludes trade quotes and stock liquidations	• Beat price by 10%
Masters Home Improvement	✓	Australian online and retail stores	• Excludes trade quotes and stock liquidations	• Beat price by 10% within 30 days of purchase

IMAGES: SHUTTERSTOCK

Price match breakdown (cont'd)

LIQUOR STORES

RETAILER	MATCH ONLINE ONLY STORES?	LOCATION REQUIREMENTS	TRICKY TERMS/EXCLUSIONS	GUARANTEE DETAILS
first CHOICE Liquor	✗	Competitor store must be within 10km of the store	• Excludes liquidations and clearance sales	• "Beat" price
Dan Murphy's	✗	Competitor store must be within 10km of the store	• Won't honour reproductions (photocopies/print outs) of competitors' vouchers • Excludes trade buyers, duty free, liquidation or clearance sales	• "Beat" price

OTHERS

RETAILER	MATCH ONLINE ONLY STORES?	LOCATION REQUIREMENTS	TRICKY TERMS/EXCLUSIONS	GUARANTEE DETAILS
CHEMIST WAREHOUSE	✗	Australian retail store	None specified	• Beat price by 10% of the difference
Officeworks	✓	Not specified	• Excludes stock liquidations, resellers, cash back offers, customer special orders, contract pricing and competitors' clearance products • Terms and conditions of store must be identical to those at Officeworks	• Beat price by 5%
Toys"R"Us	✗	Must be in same city or town	• Excludes competitors' category or storewide discounts, conditional sales, package deals, discontinued lines, loyalty or third-party offers, fire or liquidation sales, clearance/warehouse outlets	• "Match" price

honouring their price match or beat guarantees despite consumers complying with the terms and conditions could well be in breach of the ACL. We've forwarded on the details of our investigation for the ACCC to look into.

If you think you're entitled to a price match and the retailer refuses to honour it, show the staff member a copy of their corporate policy.

"If you're given a guarantee then you generally expect it to be honoured," says Schaper. "You should push the point with the business concerned. Ask them: 'If you won't honour it, why not, what's your rationale?' Explain their obligations under the ACL. If they still refuse, you can make a complaint with Consumer Affairs, Fair Trading or the ACCC… and make it clear that you'll be doing so. That actually makes a lot of businesses sit up and take things seriously."

CHOICE verdict

Even if a store doesn't offer a lowest-price guarantee, or if the offer you find doesn't fall within their terms and conditions, you may find you can get a price match at the discretion of the sales staff. It never hurts to ask, and it could save you big bucks. ■

YOUR SAY

CHOICE member **John** told us he's had some success with price match guarantees, but also some failed attempts. "Once [the lowest-price guarantee] wasn't honoured because the lower price was in the next suburb, not in the same shopping centre. [Another time it wasn't honoured] because the lower-priced item was temporarily out of stock with the competitor."

Suellen told us she wasn't able to get a price match honoured because the sale price was below cost. "I got knocked back on price matching from Dick Smith on a camera that Harvey Norman had on sale. They said they couldn't even buy it for that."

Kim had a more positive experience. "The Good Guys have price matched for us in store. In fact, their salesman searched online for prices of the item we were looking at, found the lowest price, then beat it, all while we were standing there watching."

Play your cards right

Credit cards from the big banks are giving customers a raw deal. **Uta Mihm** looks into better options, with interest rates as low as 8.99%

Australians are good savers. Making use of low home loan interest rates, we're paying back debt and adding to our savings. But 30% of Australians still carry a balance on their credit card, and paying interest on one of the credit cards from the big banks could end up costing you big time.

Banks are giving their credit card customers a raw deal. While the RBA cash rate has gone down by 2.25 percentage points since November 2011 and much of this has been passed on to home loan customers as rate cuts, credit card rates have only been discounted by 0.2 percentage points on average over the same period. Standard and rewards credit cards from ANZ, CBA, GE Money, NAB and Westpac still charge around 20% interest. It's time to call the banks out, and get a better deal.

$3236 average credit and charge card balance

$9275 average credit card limit

Sometimes, all that's needed is a phone call to your bank. For example, the big banks all offer low-rate cards that charge around 14% interest – a rate cut of about six percentage points compared with their regular cards. But if you really want to save, check our comparison of top low-interest credit cards. The best of these only charges 8.99% per annum (see page 25).

Better on balance?

Switching to a credit card with a special balance transfer rate can be smart, but only if you're able to pay off the debt in the promotional period.

If you usually carry a debt on your card, don't bother with a low introductory rate – shop around for the card with the lowest possible standard interest rate.

Check the conditions if you're disciplined about paying off debt and want a card with an introductory rate. The period for which the cheap rate applies varies and it can be limited to just the transferred balance, with interest on new transactions calculated at a higher rate, or it may apply to all transactions as well as the balance transferred. If there is a debt remaining at the end of the balance transfer period, it can be charged at the standard rate for the credit card, or at the cash advance rate, which can be much higher.

IMAGES: THINKSTOCK & SHUTTERSTOCK

How long it takes to pay off your card

Minimum monthly repayment only

Debt	Time taken to repay	Interest paid
$5000	357 mths	$10,549

Minimum repayment + $50 monthly

Debt	Time taken to repay	Interest paid
$5000	76 mths	$2722

Minimum repayment + $200 monthly

Debt	Time taken to repay	Interest paid
$5000	24 mths	$860

Assumptions Repayments calculated for a credit card with 17.43% interest rate, which is the average rate on the Mozo database, minimum repayments of 2% or $20, whichever is greater. These calculations assume you pay all fees plus the regular amounts shown. Source: Mozo.com.au

Switch and save

You can make big savings by switching to one of the cheaper credit cards in our comparison. For example, if you pay off a $2500 credit card debt, you can save

- $464 using an 8.99% card compared to a 17.43% credit card if you pay the minimum repayment plus $50 each month.

The best way to get rid of your debt is to pay off as much as you can manage – every extra dollar makes a difference. Paying only the minimum can take many years and in some cases, because of high annual fees adding to the debt, you'll never pay it off.

- On a credit card with a 17.43% interest rate, if you owe $2500, pay all fees and then the minimum each month, you'll end up paying over $4800 in interest and it'll take over 21 years before you eventually pay it off.

The larger the debt, the bigger the repayment challenge.

- If you owe $10,000 on the same card and make only minimum repayments, it will take nearly 40 years – that's 10 years longer than the standard term for your home loan.

An extra $50 or even $200 each month can dramatically reduce the repayment period and the interest costs.

- On the $10,000 balance, you'd save nearly $20,000 by paying the extra $200 per month and you'll have it paid off in three-and-a-half years.

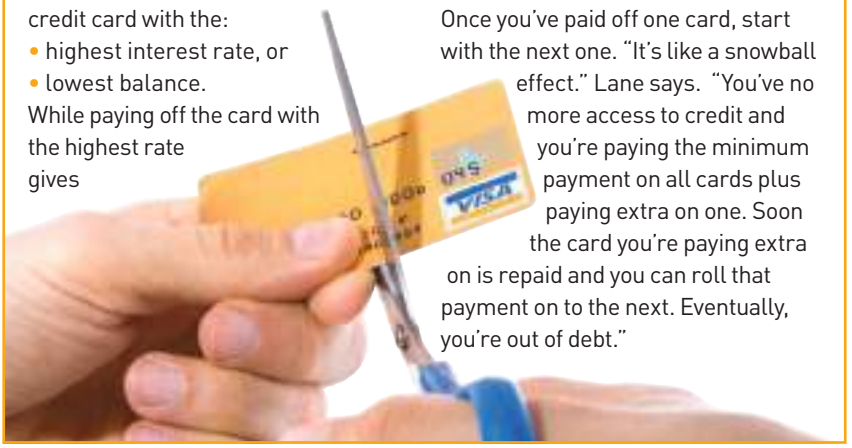
How to pay off your debt for good

What if you have more than one credit card with a balance? Katherine Lane of the Financial Rights Legal Centre recommends you put in place one of two strategies. You can either concentrate on the credit card with the:

- highest interest rate, or
- lowest balance.

While paying off the card with the highest rate gives bigger savings, paying off the one with the lowest balance will be quicker. Lane also suggests you curb your spending and replace your credit cards with a debit card or just a single credit card with a low limit.

Once you've paid off one card, start with the next one. "It's like a snowball effect." Lane says. "You've no more access to credit and you're paying the minimum payment on all cards plus paying extra on one. Soon the card you're paying extra on is repaid and you can roll that payment on to the next. Eventually, you're out of debt."



Consolidating debt – a good option?

You'd think consolidating credit card debt into a home or personal loan at a lower rate would help clear your debt. Not so, says Lane: "There's a huge amount of evidence that people consolidate debt and then draw up their credit card again." Even at today's low mortgage rates, adding a $5000 credit card debt to a 25-year mortgage, or line of credit, is the worst option. Paying off the card in a year would be the best option. ■

Consolidate debt

REPAYMENT METHOD	INTEREST REPAID ON $5000 DEBT
Over 1 year on credit card (17.43%)	$485
Over 5 years using unsecured personal loan (13.28%)	$1869
Over 7 years using home loan (5.38%)	$1012
Over 25 using home loan (5.38%)	$4104

Assumptions Fees paid separately. Source: Mozo.com.au

Top 20 credit cards

PRODUCT		INTEREST RATE (%)	SAME RATE FOR CASH ADVANCE?	ANNUAL FEE ($)
	Community First McGrath Pink Visa	8.99	Yes	40
	Victoria Teachers Mutual Bank Visa Platinum	9.99	No – 19.99%	84
	Maritime, Mining & Power Credit Union Visa	10.12	Yes	60
bankmecu	bankmecu Low Rate Visa	10.14	Yes	59
Beyond Bank	Beyond Bank Low Rate Visa	10.49	No – 19.99%	49
credit union sa	Credit Union SA Visa	10.49	Yes	10
SCU	SCU Low Rate Visa	10.49	Yes	30
police bank	Police Bank Visa	10.96	Yes	30
ADCU	ADCU Low Rate Visa	10.99	No – 19.99%	49
Virgin money	Virgin Money Low Rate	10.99	No – 21.69%	99
P&N bank	P&N Bank Easypay Visa	11.49	Yes	40
P&N bank	P&N Bank Platinum Visa	11.49	Yes	80
Teachers Mutual Bank	Teachers Mutual Bank Teachers	11.50	Yes	0
Defence Bank	Defence Bank True Blue	11.74	Yes	45
bcu	BCU Classic	11.80	Yes	40
Heritage Bank	Heritage Bank Gold Low Rate	11.80	Yes	0
	BankVic Visa Silver	11.95	Yes	0
Greater	Greater Building Society Greater Visa	11.95	Yes	40
AMERICAN EXPRESS	American Express Low Rate	11.99	na	65
NEWCASTLE PERMANENT	Newcastle Permanent Value +	11.99	No – 17.99%	49

Source: Mozo.com.au as at 12 August 2014

IMAGES: SHUTTERSTOCK

Lean cuisine?

High-protein foods are currently in vogue, but how much protein do we need and is too much dangerous? Miranda Herron investigates

With the growth of high-protein, low-carb diets like the Paleo diet, and the move into the mainstream of weight training, protein has become the new darling of health-conscious consumers.

Market research from the US and UK suggests that high-protein products are attractive to consumers based on their reputed benefits for weight-loss, satiety and post-training enhanced muscle tone. International research company Mintel also suggests that demand for high-protein products, in the US at least, is also coming from people who are avoiding animal sources of protein for health, environmental or ethical reasons.

Health advocates agree that most people are getting as much protein as they need, and often even more. So what exactly is protein, and is the high-protein trend dangerous?

Essential for life

Proteins are large molecules made up of amino acids. When joined together in different patterns, the amino acids create different proteins. There are about 10,000 types of proteins in the body and they are essential for the proper functioning of cells and are used as the basis of muscle, bone, skin, hair and other tissues. The Recommended Dietary Intake (RDI) of protein is around 0.8g/kg of body weight per day, meaning a 100kg man would need 80g per day.

"Most people can easily meet their protein requirements, even vegans," says accredited nutritionist Catherine Saxelby. "The problem with getting more than you need is you end up with extra, empty calories. Unused protein becomes glucose, which can turn into excess body fat if you don't do enough exercise to burn it off."

Approximate amount of protein in foods per 100g

Wholemeal bread – 9g
Low-fat yoghurt – 6.8g
Milk – 3.5g
Chickpeas – 6.3g
Eggs – 12.7g
Almonds – 19.5g
Steak (lean) – 22g

Protein overload?

A 2014 study suggested that a high-protein diet raised the risk of "all-cause mortality", but this was mainly associated with a high consumption of animal protein.

"Fresh meat like beef or lamb is a better choice than processed meats such as hot dogs, salami, bacon and ham, which are linked to an increased risk of bowel cancer," says Saxelby.

There has also been concern that high-protein diets may promote kidney damage. Other adverse side effects that have been associated with such diets include lack of energy, constipation, vitamin and mineral deficiencies, and bad breath.

"There isn't enough evidence to show that high-protein diets are dangerous or safe in the long term," says Dr Alison Gosby, from the University of Sydney's Charles Perkins Centre. "This is mainly because it's hard to get studies of people on long-term high-protein diets. These diets are unsustainable and people find it hard to stick to the diet for more than six weeks."

An appetite for protein?

New research from the University of Sydney suggests that regardless of age or BMI, humans have an instinctive drive to eat a certain amount of protein and will keep eating until the right level is consumed.

The research indicates this appetite for protein could be a key factor in the global obesity epidemic, as diets shift towards an increased proportion of processed foods that are higher in carbohydrates or fat, and lower in protein.

"When you consume things like soft drinks, which are fairly low in protein but high in kilojoules, if you haven't fulfilled your 'protein appetite', you'll keep eating more food until you get the protein you need and may end up consuming more kilojoules than you need," says Gosby, lead author of the research. "We don't know yet what is the exact level the body wants, but believe the RDI of 0.8g/kg body weight is probably the best amount to satisfy 'protein appetite'."

Gosby doesn't recommend increasing protein intake, but suggests that when trying to lose weight people should look at the type of food they are eating, not just total kilojoules.

The benefits of protein and weight loss only apply up to 1.6g protein/kg body weight you consume per day. After that there are no benefits to eating extra protein

Protein has been found to help weight loss in other ways, says Saxelby. "Foods that are naturally high in protein and thus have a low GI (glycaemic index) are slow to digest and help keep people full."

If you are full you are less likely to snack, and anecdotally, people who have tried higher protein diets say they have a reduced craving for sweets, she says. Eating some protein at each meal throughout the day is important to help keep hunger away.

There is also compelling evidence that a high-protein diet helps maintain lean muscle mass, which means you are less likely to lose lean muscle and more likely to lose fat. "However, the benefits of protein for weight loss only apply up to 1.6g protein/kg body weight [that you consume] per day. After that there are no benefits to eating extra protein," says Gosby.

So what's the most nutritious source?

There are two types of protein – "complete proteins" generally from animal products such as meat and dairy, which have all nine "essential" amino acids. Essential means the body can't produce them and they must be sourced from food.

The second type is "incomplete proteins" from plant sources such as rice, beans, peas, lentils, nuts, seeds, wheat, oats and corn that may be low or lacking in one or more of the amino acids.

Soy, quinoa and amaranth are examples of complete plant proteins.

Previously, vegetarians, and vegans in particular, were told that they needed to eat a combination of incomplete plant proteins at each meal in order to make up a "complete protein" meal.

However, as an article in the *Medical Journal of Australia* pointed out in 2012, if people regularly eat a wide variety of plant-based proteins they will get enough of the various types of amino acids and strict protein combining is not necessary.

"The only groups that we would be concerned about being vegan are toddlers under five and pregnant

80g

The recommended daily dietary intake of protein for a 100kg man

IMAGE: SHUTTERSTOCK

women because they may not get enough vitamin B12, iron and zinc from plant proteins. There have been cases of babies born with B12 deficiencies to vegan mothers," says Saxelby.

Vegetarians who eat dairy and eggs as well as plant proteins will get all the amino acids they need, says Saxelby. "Eggs are excellent, with lots of vitamins, minerals and protein. They're inexpensive and can be served in a variety of ways."

Other sources of vegetable protein include chickpeas, tofu, tempeh, sesame, sunflower and poppy seeds, edamame beans, leafy greens, chia, and soy milk.

Then there's Quorn – a meat substitute made from mycoprotein, which is a member of the fungi family grown in a fermentation process similar to that used in making bread and beer. It can be found in the freezer section of supermarkets.

"Quorn is a great vegetable source of protein and tastes good as a mince substitute," says Saxelby.

There have been reports of gastric discomfort after eating Quorn, but Food Standards Australia and New Zealand says it's not aware of any medically confirmed reactions to the products in Australia. Consumers who may have had a reaction are advised to stop eating the food and to see a medical practitioner.

"The marketing around protein powders gives protein an angelic glow, with claims like 'transformation-making protein', when in fact there are healthier and more affordable ways to get your protein"

The protein powder rip-off

Once used mainly by elite athletes and bodybuilders, protein supplements such as powders, shakes, and bars have spread into the mainstream.

"People believe protein is magic and that they need as much as possible, especially when it comes to exercise and muscle building and recovery," says accredited practising dietitian Zoe Wilson. "The marketing around protein powders gives protein an angelic glow, with claims like 'transformation-making protein', when in fact there are healthier and more affordable ways to get your protein."

"Suddenly protein is a glamour ingredient," agrees Saxelby. "I see a lot more young men are into weights and they tend to drink a lot of shakes because they are busy and don't have great cooking skills."

Most protein supplements are made from soy, pea, or dairy-based whey or casein, and also contain additives such as vegetable gums, thickeners, artificial sweeteners and flavours, and soluble fibre (inulin).

Not only are these products no more effective than whole foods, they're generally more expensive, and can be significantly higher in kilojoules.

Wilson compared Swisse and BSc brands of protein powder to a glass of skim milk or two eggs, and found that although the high-protein powders did provide more protein, they were higher in kilojoules and up to seven times the price of the milk or eggs.

The problem with using protein shakes as a meal replacement, Saxelby says, is that drinking liquid calories is not like eating real food with naturally occurring fibre. The fibre added to protein powder/drinks is not normal fibre that you would get from grains, fruit and vegetables. They're often soy fibre, inulin or methylcellulose, which are extracted and purified – not whole foods with an intact cell structure that our bodies have to break down.

Drinks are easy and quick to consume, which means people may drink more kilojoules than they need.

"These very high-protein products are not necessary for building muscle as more protein doesn't mean more muscle," says Saxelby. "Men won't bulk up unless they are pumping enough weights to consume the extra calories. After training, foods such as low-fat flavoured milk or a small tin of tuna are a better choice."

IMAGE: SHUTTERSTOCK

Puncturing the myths

$24.3m
Medicare expenditure on acupuncture (2013)

It's widely accepted in the medical mainstream, but does acupuncture stand up to scientific scrutiny? **Karina Bray** finds out

The practice of acupuncture has evolved over more than two thousand years, and from its origins in Oriental mystique, has entered the medical mainstream in Western societies.

While early research seemed to support its benefit for many and varied conditions, the lack of a scientifically plausible explanation as to how it works and improved methods of testing have tempered enthusiasm among the science and medicine fraternity. In this article, we'll review the current evidence for acupuncture in the context of its medical mainstreaming, and what this means for consumers.

Getting to the point: what is acupuncture?

While the time and place of its origins are often debated, it's widely reported that acupuncture used today is based on a Chinese practice from around 2500 years ago or more. The theory goes that the body has a supply of an energy force called qi (pronounced "chee") that flows through its meridians – a network of invisible channels through the body. Blockages or shortages of qi result in disease or illness. Acupuncture, then, is used to clear blockages and stimulate normal flow of qi by inserting fine needles or applying pressure at particular points along the meridians.

The 1970s saw a huge rise in interest and acceptance of acupuncture in Western medicine, with many doctors referring patients for acupuncture treatment or taking courses themselves to become medical acupuncturists.

The Australian Medical Acupuncture College, a professional association for doctors with acupuncture qualifications obtained though university or teaching hospitals, was formed in 1973 and now has more than 600 members.

Acupuncture can be claimed on Medicare and private health insurance.

Reasons to be sceptical

Despite some acceptance by the medical profession, doctors and scientists critical of acupuncture point out that meridians and qi have never been detected, even after decades of scientific research, and that the structural foundation of acupuncture is therefore non-existent.

A review of acupuncture history reveals uncertainties within the field, and the number of meridians has varied from nine to 11, 12, 14, 20 and 36, with varying sub-meridians, while also differing in location and pathway. That's perhaps not surprising, given the long history of acupuncture theory and practice, where new developments and understanding may supersede older ones.

But even in the short history of auricular acupuncture (see page 30), there are now many maps of ear acupuncture points, with little agreement about which points on the ear correspond to points on the body.

Medical acupuncturists don't necessarily accept the theoretical underpinnings of acupuncture, and doctors may look to biologically plausible explanations. The American Academy of Medical Acupuncture, for example, proposes that needling the acupuncture points stimulates the nervous system to release chemicals in the muscles, spinal cord, and brain, changing the experience of pain or triggering the release of other chemicals and hormones which produce physiological effects. However, while it's ▸

One label, many methods

Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) acupuncture is the most commonly used acupuncture in Western countries, based on 12 main meridians, eight extraordinary meridians and around 400 acupoints. Japanese acupuncture uses fewer needles than Chinese, and Korean acupuncture uses more.

Korean hand acupuncture The hand is believed to be a microcosm of the body, with each part of the body corresponding to a part of the hand. Disease is indicated when the acupoint is discoloured or tender. Stimulating these acupoints by needles or pressure is claimed to have a beneficial effect on the corresponding body part.

Auricular acupuncture After observing that the human ear looked a little like an upside down, curled-up foetus, French doctor Paul Nogier devised a system of acupoints in the 1950s, where positions on the ear-foetus corresponded to areas of the body (below). It's used mainly for pain control, anxiety, and substance addictions.

Medical acupuncture This is the term used for acupuncture performed by a medical doctor who has also had acupuncture training as a specialty practice.

plausible that sticking needles in the skin could affect the transmission of some pain messages, it doesn't explain all acupuncture phenomena.

So, does it work?

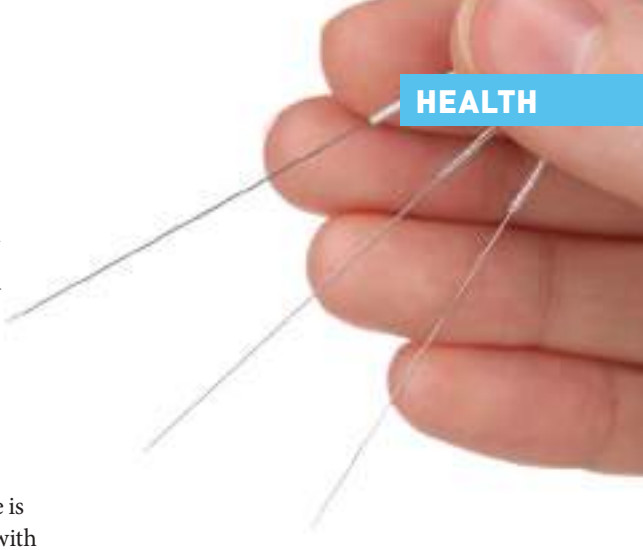
One of the first large reviews of acupuncture studies, conducted for the World Health Organization (WHO) in 1979, concluded it was useful for more than 20 conditions and ailments, including various types of pain, musculoskeletal problems, respiratory illnesses and digestive complaints. The next WHO report, published in 2003, recommended acupuncture for 28 conditions, listed 63 for which there was some evidence but required further proof, and 16 for which it was "worth trying".

Since then, with better quality reviews considering only high-quality studies with adequate control measures, the number of conditions for which acupuncture appears to be effective has dramatically dwindled. In particular, the use of "sham acupuncture" – using telescopic needles that retract on touching the skin, superficial insertion of needles or positioning needles randomly rather than on specific acupoints – as a point of comparison, instead of no treatment, has improved the quality of studies.

As it stands today, the best evidence for acupuncture is in chronic neck pain – more than one review has consistently found it has positive effects over controls in good-quality studies. Less convincing, though still mostly positive, is evidence for chronic back pain, chronic headache and osteoarthritis of the knee. However, the difference between acupuncture and controls is modest, and it may be more meaningful to compare it in trials with other "active" treatment, reflecting the decision a clinician faces.

As it stands today, the best evidence in favour of acupuncture is for chronic neck pain

Acupuncture to prevent post-operative nausea and vomiting has been found helpful in a number of studies. A large review of studies in 2009 concluded there was a small effect, although some feel the conclusion wasn't supported by the evidence. Another popular recommendation for acupuncture is for assisted fertility treatments, in particular in vitro fertilisation – increasing the number of eggs that can be harvested or increasing the rate of pregnancy and live birth. Unfortunately, a large review in 2013 found no evidence to support it.



But the WHO says it works!

Many proponents and practitioners of acupuncture defer to the WHO and their reviews, with claims like "The World Health Organization confirmed in 2003 that acupuncture has been proven to treat a number of illnesses, including depression, reactions to chemotherapy, headaches, arthritis, sciatica, and even stroke, to name a few…".

However, The 2003 review document referred to – and linked to – on hundreds of acupuncture websites is considered flawed, because it's written by people heavily biased towards acupuncture, because they included many studies which had methodological flaws, and because they ignore the safety aspects and adverse events.

The authors commissioned by the WHO also relied heavily on research from China. A review of acupuncture studies found that 99% of studies from China published positive results, which would be unusually high even for a highly effective treatment, suggesting publication bias in action, where negative or neutral results for acupuncture remain unreported.

Earlier this year, the WHO removed the main link to its acupuncture report from its website acknowledging that the information it contained was out of date and no longer appropriate, and says it is revising its approach to reviewing research on traditional and complementary medicine, including acupuncture.

Just a placebo?

What can be said about acupuncture is that there is a strong placebo effect, with many studies finding the effectiveness of "sham acupuncture" to be equal to the real thing, and more effective than no treatment. Even medical acupuncture proponents point out that having a positive attitude towards acupuncture contributes to its effectiveness, while a negative attitude ("this won't work") will block its effects. A neutral attitude or open mind won't hinder the effects.

There is a strong placebo effect, with many studies finding the effectiveness of "sham acupuncture" to be equal to the real thing

Advocates point out that animals respond to the healing powers of acupuncture, even though they have no understanding of the theory behind it and therefore can't be susceptible to the placebo effect. However, critics argue that any effect observed in animals could be due to the animals benefiting from increased attention, or observer bias – the owner knows the animal has had treatment, and thinks the animal seems better.

While there is some evidence that acupuncture "works", there are risks involved. A large study from Germany covering 2.2 million acupuncture sessions in 229,230 patients in a hospital setting found the overall rate of adverse events was 8.6%, and 2.2% required medical treatment, leading authors to conclude that "acupuncture provided by physicians is a relatively safe treatment". The rate among acupuncturists not medically trained is not known.

The most common adverse events include pain, bleeding, bruising, headaches and tiredness at the milder end, with more serious consequences including pneumothorax (where the lung cavity is punctured, leading to a collapsed lung), broken needles and infection (for example hepatitis or bacterial).

The Australian Medical Acupuncture College claims medical acupuncturists offer the best of both worlds: as registered medical practitioners, they can ensure proper diagnosis and safe treatment, and they're able to institute treatments or investigations and deal with complications arising from acupuncture. ■

Acupuncture foot scheme

IMAGE: SHUTTERSTOCK

BOTTOM LINE

- Acupuncture may help chronic neck pain; there's some evidence for chronic back pain, headache osteoarthritis of the knee and post-operative nausea and vomiting.
- Acupuncture is relatively safe, but not without risk.
- A medical acupuncturist is medically trained in diagnostics and can provide conventional medical treatment if it's deemed more appropriate.

Fight for your rights

It can be hard to see the silver lining in renting, but **Jemma Castle** digs up a few rights you probably didn't know you had

Many Australians dream of one day owning their own home, but this dream may not become a reality for everyone. The number of renters around the country has been on the rise since the mid-1990s. And for many the pressures are great, with recent CHOICE research showing that 45% of renters are finding it difficult to get by.

"Renting can, and should, be a legitimate long-term housing option for those who want it," says James Bennett from the Tenants Union of Victoria. "Unfortunately, tenants are often unaware of their rights or reluctant to enforce the rights they do have for fear of possible reprisal, particularly given the shortage of affordable rental properties."

The good news is that there are several rights you do have as a renter that you may not know about.

Rental increases: how much and how often?

While you're on a fixed-term tenancy agreement (provided it's less than two years), your rent generally can't be increased unless it's been written into your agreement.

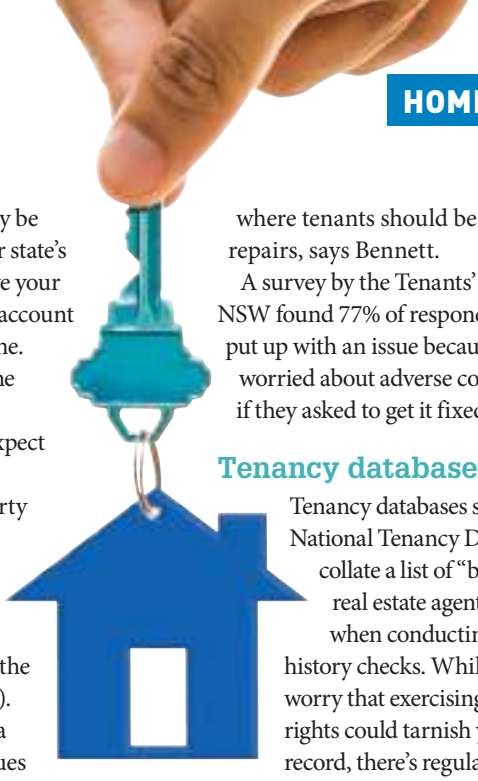
But once that's finished, unless you choose to sign another fixed-term agreement, you'll move onto a periodic or rolling lease. On these types of agreements the rent can be increased. However, normally your rent can only be increased once every six to 12 months (depending on your state or territory – see table, below). This clause is notably absent in NSW, where there's no limit to how often your rent can be increased. You're also entitled to a notice period of 60 days (except in the NT where it's only 30 days).

> **"Tenants are often unaware of their rights or reluctant to enforce [them] for fear of reprisal"**

Excessive rental increases

While there isn't a set percentage by which rent can or can't increase, a landlord cannot increase the amount excessively. If you believe the increase is excessive, you

STATE/TERRITORY	HOW OFTEN CAN RENT BE INCREASED ON A PERIODIC LEASE?	NOTICE PERIOD?
NSW	No limit	60 days
Qld, Tas, Vic, WA and NT	Once every six months	60 days / two months 30 days (NT)
ACT and SA	Once every 12 months	60 days (SA) / eight weeks (ACT)



can try disputing it through your state's appropriate service, which in most cases is a civil and administrative tribunal. If deemed excessive, the tribunal can issue an enforceable order preventing all or part of the increase and set a period of time for which no further increases can be applied.

How can you know if the increase is excessive? There are no hard and fast rules, but the tribunal will consider factors such as:

- the range of market rents charged for similar properties in the area
- the condition of the property
- the level of repairs the landlord has done and the amount they've had to spend
- how long it's been since the last increase
- if you've paid for any work to be done
- the proposed increase compared to the current rent. There's no set amount that's regarded as excessive, but as a guide, ACT legislation specifies that unless the landlord can justify the rise through another means, an increase of more than 20% of the average increase in rents is excessive.

Fee-free rent payments

When CHOICE looked into third-party rent collection back in 2012, we found a lack of regulation saw some renters being charged fees to pay their rent.

While the situation has improved in some states, many renters are still unprotected. In South Australia, New South Wales and Queensland, you're entitled to be offered at least one fee-free way to pay rent. Other states and territories don't provide such strong protections.

Right to repairs

Although each state and territory requires landlords to conduct repairs in order to maintain the property in a reasonable condition, this doesn't always happen. A recent survey by the Tenants' Union of NSW found that for 47% of participants, their landlord only responded to repair and maintenance requests sometimes; eight per cent said landlords never responded at all.

You can't stop paying your rent if your landlord doesn't carry out the repairs. But you may be entitled to apply to your state's tenancy tribunal to have your rent paid into a special account until the repairs are done.

So what's covered? The standard of repairs and maintenance you can expect will vary depending on:

- the state of the property when you moved in
- the age of the property and its prospective life, and
- the price you pay for the property (potentially).

Excessive mould as a result of structural issues or broken elements on a stovetop are common recurring issues where tenants should be entitled to repairs, says Bennett.

A survey by the Tenants' Union of NSW found 77% of respondents have put up with an issue because they were worried about adverse consequences if they asked to get it fixed.

Tenancy databases

Tenancy databases such as the National Tenancy Database aim to collate a list of "bad" tenants real estate agents can consult when conducting tenant history checks. While you might worry that exercising your tenant rights could tarnish your rental record, there's regulation around how these databases can be used (except in the NT). There are, in fact,

RETALIATORY EVICTIONS

It's essentially pointless to provide protections for tenants if they're too afraid to assert them for fear of retaliation from their landlord. Research from the Tenants' Union of Queensland in 2012 found that no-grounds evictions were the most common form, and in many of these cases tenants felt they were a means of retaliation.

Thankfully, most states and territories provide some sort of protection against retaliatory evictions. In a recent case, three tenants on the NSW Central Coast had each written to their estate agent requesting a review of rent increases that were for varying amounts up to $130. Two days later, the tenants each received no-grounds eviction notices. The Central Coast Tenants' Advice and Advocacy Service (CCTAAS) helped the tenants apply for orders deeming this rent increase to be excessive, and the eviction to be retaliatory.

"The matter was settled before it reached the tribunal, with the notice of terminations not being acted on and the rent increases being reviewed to a more reasonable increase," says Sidonie Gnauck from CCTAAS.

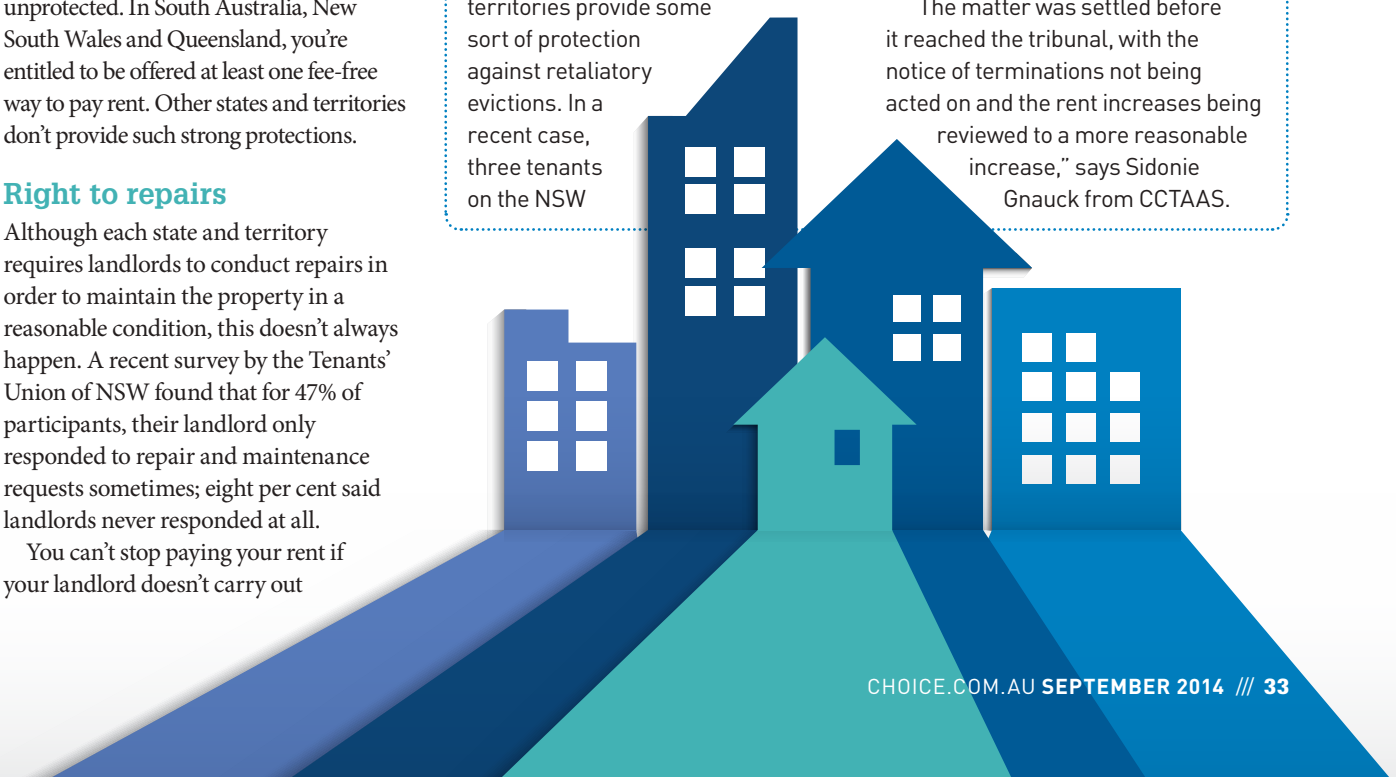


IMAGE: SHUTTERSTOCK

only two reasons for which your name can be put on a tenancy database. You can only be listed if your tenancy has ended and:

- your rent is in arrears by an amount in excess of the bond, or
- you've breached your tenancy agreement.

So you can't be listed for a trivial matter or simply because you exercised your rights. The agent or landlord is also required to tell you if they intend to list you so you have time to consider and dispute the information. You must also be informed if an agent finds a listing on you when they conduct their checks. Listings older than three years must also be removed.

Getting your bond back

When you pay your bond, in most states and territories you're required to lodge it with the relevant bond authority so that if there's a dispute at the end of your lease, the money is held by a third party. This also means you can apply for your bond back independently if there's a dispute between you and your landlord.

"The idea that your landlord won't give your bond back is a bit of a furphy," explains Ned Cutcher from the NSW Tenants' Union. As soon as your tenancy is over, in NSW you have the right to unilaterally apply to the NSW Civil and Administrative Tribunal to get your bond back – that is, "you don't need to wait for your landlord to sign off", Cutcher says. The landlord must then make a case to the bond board in a timely fashion if there's anything they want to complain about.

It's a similar story in Victoria. As a tenant you can apply directly to the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal if you can't reach an agreement with the landlord on your application to the bond board. If the landlord intends to make a claim on the bond, they must do so within 10 days of the tenancy agreement finishing. ■

Do I need to steam-clean the carpets?

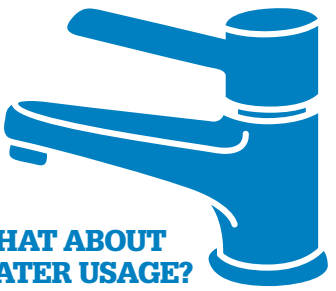
So you've scrubbed the house from top to bottom, only to find your agent or landlord wants a receipt for carpet steam-cleaning before they'll give your bond back.

In NSW, the law is clear – it's prohibited to include a term in a lease requiring you to have the carpets professionally cleaned, unless you've agreed to it as a condition so you can keep pets. But for renters in other states and territories, legislation simply requires you to ensure that the house is "reasonably clean". The definition of "reasonably" will generally depend on the condition of the house when you moved in.

While no tenancy laws require professional carpet cleaning, landlords and agents may include it as a special term on a lease. Fair trading and consumer affairs bodies outside NSW generally acknowledge that if it's in the lease you need to honour it. But Bennett says that in Victoria lease provisions requiring the carpets to be cleaned aren't automatically enforceable.

"Tenants are obliged to leave the premises 'reasonably clean', and if carpets meet this standard by normal cleaning then nothing further is legally required. The Tenants Union of Victoria has successfully argued these types of cases at VCAT; however, many tenants continue to pay for professional cleaning even in situations where it is not required or enforceable," Bennett says.

But if a landlord or agent can prove carpets were professionally cleaned when you moved in, some tenants' unions say it's a reasonable expectation to do so upon leaving.



WHAT ABOUT WATER USAGE?

When it comes to water bills, you're only liable for your consumption charges, not other associated supply charges (except in SA, where costs can be passed on).

If you're on a shared meter (e.g. in apartments) you can't be charged for your consumption either. This doesn't apply in SA or WA, where consumption on shared meters can be charged provided the method of calculation is spelled out in the lease. In NSW and Queensland, you also can't be charged for consumption if the correct water efficiency measures aren't installed (these vary in each state). This isn't a requirement in other states, although if a water fixture needs to be replaced in Victoria it must be done with an A-rated fixture.

Contract killers

Unfair contract terms are now supposed to be illegal, but telcos and energy suppliers don't seem to have noticed, as Andy Kollmorgen discovers

Unfair terms in consumer contracts have been banned since the introduction of the new Australian Consumer Law (ACL) in 2011.

But they don't seem to have disappeared. Mobile phone and energy contracts still appear to have plenty of them, including terms that allow electricity suppliers to raise your rates mid-contract.

And when it comes to mobile phones and other telco services, unfair contracts are standard fare, according to the Australian Communications Consumer Action Network (ACCAN). That's probably why the Telecommunications Industry Ombudsman (TIO) has received about 1200 complaints a year about unfair mobile phone contracts over the past three years.

What's an unfair contract term, anyway?

Under the ACL, an unfair contract term is one that:

- would cause a significant imbalance in the parties' rights and obligations arising under the contract
- is not reasonably necessary to protect the legitimate interests of the party who would be advantaged by the term, and/or
- would cause detriment (whether financial or otherwise) to a party if it were to be applied or relied on.

The ombudsman received about 1200 complaints a year about unfair mobile contracts over three years

You don't have to look far to find terms in mobile phone contracts and energy contracts that appear to fit that definition. For example, Energy Australia's 52-page market retail contract says it can:

- vary the tariffs and charges set out in a contract, or introduce new tariffs and charges, "for any reason"
- discontinue any discounts, rebates or other benefits in a contracted plan if the network tariff changes (even though energy customers have no control over tariff rates)
- absolve itself of responsibility for any loss or damage that occurs due to total or partial failure to supply energy to your premises.

IMAGE: SHUTTERSTOCK

In effect, Energy Australia, along with other electricity suppliers, reserves the right to change the terms of the contract midstream at the customers' expense. However, the terms in question, which are standard in many energy contracts, have not been tested by a court of law.

An Energy Australia spokesperson told us the terms and conditions "align with state and federal regulations and consumer protection laws, and are fair and balanced to ensure our customers understand what protections and rights they have when they sign up with us".

The trouble with mobile contracts

In 2013, ACCAN released a report on unfair contract terms forced on customers by telecommunication businesses including Telstra, Optus and Vodafone. There was no shortage of terms that might be considered unfair in mobile phone contracts. Many gave the telco, but not the consumer, the right to change the deal after the contract was signed, a tactic known as unilateral variation.

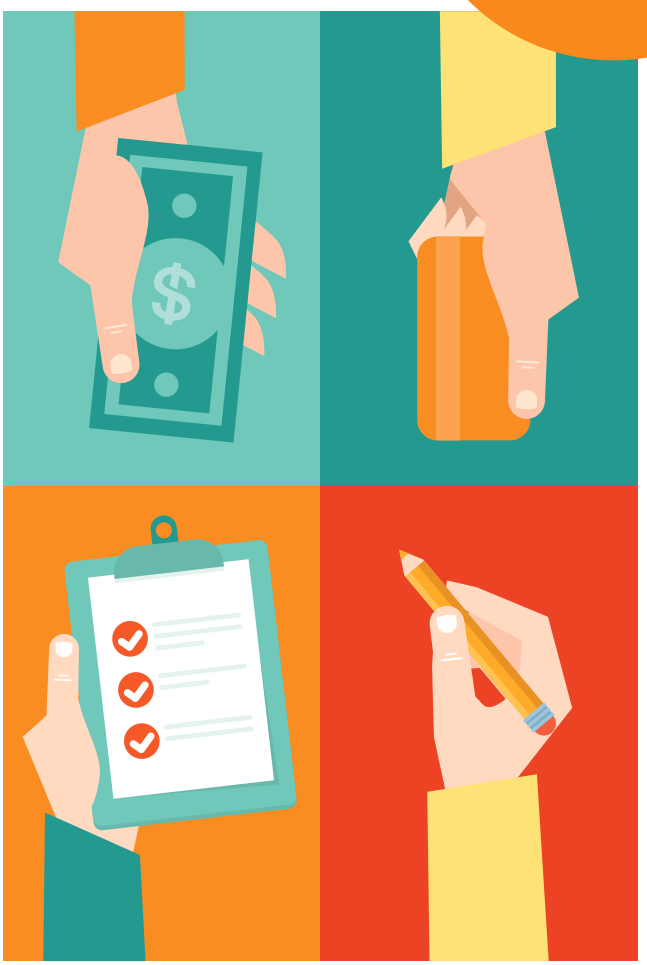
In fact, many of the contracts ACCAN reviewed gave telcos the right to change any terms they wanted mid-contract, including those having to do with monthly access fees, minimum monthly fees, termination and default fees, call or data rates, download limits and the actual features of the service. And the changes could be made at any time, under any circumstances, and to any degree.

One of the worst culprits was the internet service provider Netspeed, whose contract said it could "change prices or services at any time without prior notice to customers or the public" as well as "terminate any account at any time with or without cause or reason". It also required customers to agree to indemnify Netspeed against liability of any kind.

ACCAN alerted the ACCC to these contract terms, and they were ruled unfair by the Federal Court in 2013.

1200

The number of annual complaints to the TIO about unfair contract terms



Both Telstra and Optus made slight changes to the wording in their contracts following the ACCAN review, while Vodafone clarified a few points. But all the telcos defended their right to unilaterally change the terms in mid-contract.

Complaints to the TIO about "poor information" in Telstra and Optus contracts dropped noticeably (20% and 37%) between 2011-12 and 2012-13. But there are still plenty of contract complaints coming in – 5289 against Telstra and 3249 against Optus in 2012-13 alone. And overall complaints specifically related to unfair contract terms have remained steady at an average of about three per day for the last three years, according to ombudsman Simon Cohen.

"If a consumer complains to the TIO about their telco making a unilateral contract change, we will review the contract terms and also look at whether the provider has acted fairly," Cohen told us. "Things we consider are whether the contract allows for a unilateral change, and whether the contract's terms are fair or unfairly balanced in the telco's favour. We ask what notice of any change has been given, the impact on the consumer, and whether other options have been made available."

If the TIO decides a contract term is unfair, Cohen says the resolution "may include allowing the consumer to exit a contract without any penalty, or requiring the telco to comply with the original terms of the contract".

Power imbalance in energy contracts?

The Victoria-based Consumer Utilities Advocacy Centre has been pushing for an end to unilateral variation in energy contracts, which allow energy suppliers to increase tariffs any time they want, even for fixed-term contracts.

"Consumers can spend time shopping around to find the best value deal and sign a contract, only to find the retailer can notify them straight away that it intends to increase the tariff," the Centre says. "Good deals can quickly turn into expensive deals, and because the customers have signed a fixed-term contract, they're likely to face an exit fee if they wish to change retailers."

Consumers may sign a contract only to find the retailer notifies them it intends to raise the tariff

In a recent survey of 507 Victorians, 86% said unilateral variation was unfair and 94% supported new regulations that would ban it. The trouble for consumers is that it takes a court proceeding to declare a contract term unfair. If that happens, the term will be struck from the contract, which will otherwise remain valid. ■

IMAGE: SHUTTERSTOCK

MAKING A COMPLAINT ABOUT UNFAIR CONTRACTS

Who do you turn to if you believe you've signed a contract with an unfair term? The ACCC, ASIC and state and territory consumer protection agencies all have enforcement duties with regard to unfair contract terms – or you can take a service provider to court yourself. ASIC has jurisdiction if it's a financial product; the other agencies are empowered to step in in the case of other goods and services. It may not be a straightforward process, and you may have to pay for legal help. The ACCC, for instance, doesn't act on individual complaints but may add your case to its files. We asked Consumer Affairs Victoria if it handles complaints about energy contracts and were told to contact Victoria's Energy and Water Ombudsman. Yet the ombudsman service said it doesn't handle these.

NSW Fair Trading told us it's up to the customer to try to resolve the issue with the provider as a first step. If that doesn't work you can a lodge a complaint, and Fair Trading will act as an "informal negotiator", but it can't make a decision that a term is unfair, a spokesperson said. If the agency thinks your complaint calls for investigation, it can seek a declaration from the Supreme Court that a contract term is unfair. If no such declaration is forthcoming, you can:

- make an application to the NSW Civil & Administrative Tribunal (or the equivalent agency in your state), or
- make an application to the Supreme Court for a declaration that a contract term is unfair, but only with the leave of the court. Fair Trading says you should seek legal advice if you're considering this option.

94%

The proportion of Victorians who think unilateral contract variation should be banned

ACCC TAKES ON AGL

In December 2013, the ACCC initiated a legal case against AGL South Australia. "AGL SA represented to consumers that if they entered into an energy plan, they would receive a specified discount off the charges they would otherwise pay AGL SA," chair Rod Sims said. "However, AGL SA later increased the rates charged to consumers under energy plans and, despite representing that the discounts would continue, the level of discounts that consumers had signed up to was eroded.

Chilled out

Ever wondered how the shelf life of some chilled foods can be so long? **Rachel Clemons** looks into how manufacturers extend the life of foods

The shelf life of a food is the length of time it can keep before it begins to deteriorate or, in some cases, before the food becomes less nutritious or even unsafe. A range of traditional methods for extending the shelf life of foods have been successfully used for decades, and in some cases thousands of years – think salt curing, smoking, pickling, freezing, commercial sterilisation and canning, or the addition of chemical preservatives.

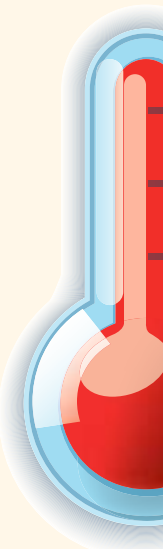
The benefits of an extended shelf life for manufacturers are wide-ranging. The product can remain on sale on the shelf for longer; wastage and product returns from the retailer are reduced; more extensive product distribution is possible; and highly seasonal products can be stockpiled, to name just a few.

But more often it's fresh foods, rather than frozen or shelf-stable (ambient) foods, that are favoured and valued by consumers – and therefore by retailers. And most consumers aren't likely to want preservatives or other additives used to make these fresh foods safe and stable.

Keeping food chilled is essential (ideal storage temperatures are 5°C or less). But there are ways of processing or packaging fresh foods that will add extra days, weeks and sometimes even months to their refrigerated shelf life.

Processing methods

Flash pasteurisation



Flash pasteurisation, also known as high-temperature short-time (HTST) processing, is a process used on perishable beverages such as fruit and vegetable juices and milk. It's based on the same principles as traditional pasteurisation, using heat to kill food-spoilage microbes such as bacteria, yeast and mould (see When Good Foods Go Bad, page 40). But as the name suggests, it uses higher temperatures for shorter times – milk, for example, is held at a minimum of 72°C for 15 seconds. The liquid is then cooled quickly and poured into sterile containers.

Flash pasteurisation is thought to cause less damage to the nutrient composition and sensory characteristics of foods (such as flavour and smell) than the more

traditional low-temperature, long-time pasteurisation treatments. But unlike UHT (see page 40), flash pasteurised products still require refrigeration to prevent further growth of microbes.

In the chilled juice market, flash pasteurisation is sometimes used in conjunction with preservatives to extend shelf life. Some flash pasteurised products – Nudie juices for example – are preservative-free. Yet CHOICE has spotted some in our local supermarket's chiller with a shelf life of six weeks – a significant advance on the roughly two or three days for juice you squeeze at home.

High-pressure processing

High-pressure processing (HPP) is where pressures of up to 700MPa (7000 times the pressure of the atmosphere) are applied to food for a short time to inactivate microbes.

HPP has several benefits over heat treatments. It doesn't disrupt chemical bonds, so the final treated product generally has a far fresher taste, crisper texture, higher nutritional value and more natural colour compared with thermally processed counterparts, according to the CSIRO. Research from that organisation has also found the quality and nutritional value of HPP juice is similar to fresh juice, and that consumers can't pick out differences in appearance or taste between HPP orange juice and fresh-squeezed juice.

The process also significantly extends the shelf life of food. In our local supermarket fridge we saw Preshafruit juices, which are HPP treated and preservative-free, with a shelf life of six months, for example. HPP is, however, expensive. To date in Australia, it's been used successfully in fruits and juices, ready-to-eat meats and guacamole – and most of these are high-value, specialised products attracting premium prices.

IMAGE: SHUTTERSTOCK & CASPAK.COM.AU

Packaging methods

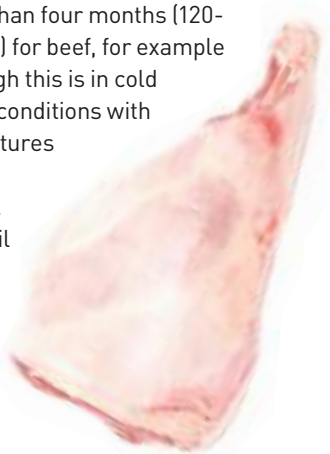
Different packaging methods generally achieve an extended shelf life for food by removing or reducing oxygen from around its surface. Lowering the amount of oxygen slows down and inhibits the growth of any bacteria on food. It also minimises oxidation – the process that can cause fat-containing foods such as meat to go rancid, or a cut apple to turn brown.

Vacuum packaging

Although it's just one of many companies that produce vacuum shrink bag packaging, the name Cryovac is often synonymous with the process. In the 1960s the Cryovac organisation and a US meat company joined forces to develop the concept of breaking down, vacuum-packing and transporting primal and subprimal cuts of meat, rather than shipping them in hanging carcass form.

In this process, almost all the air is removed prior to the final sealing of the pack, which must be made of plastic materials that retain the vacuum and have low permeability to oxygen. Myoglobin, the main natural pigment in fresh meat, goes darker in the absence of oxygen, which is why vacuum-packed meat can be purple in appearance (although the colour reverts to red when exposed again to air).

The shelf life of vacuum-packaged fresh meat can run to months – more than four months (120-140 days) for beef, for example – although this is in cold storage conditions with temperatures close to freezing. The retail display life of fresh meat in the supermarket fridge is generally shorter – the longest we saw was just shy of three weeks for a leg of lamb – although it's more than the three to five days expected shelf life of fresh meat stored in the fridge at home.



Modified-atmosphere packaging

Modified-atmosphere packaging (MAP) is food packaging in which the composition of the air surrounding the food in the package is changed. The main gases used in MAP are oxygen, carbon dioxide or nitrogen, an inert gas.

The MAP technique is particularly useful for products that won't stand up to hard vacuum or that tend to spoil or change colour in low-oxygen situations. Gas mixtures can be adjusted so that there's adequate carbon dioxide to inhibit the growth of microbes but also sufficient oxygen for meat to retain an appealing red colour, for example.

MAP can be used with various fresh or minimally processed foods, including meat, seafood, fruits and vegetables.

An additional piece of packaging technology that can be incorporated after removing most atmospheric oxygen using vacuum or MAP, and therefore further extend shelf life, is an oxygen scavenger. Commonly in the form of a small sachet containing iron-based compounds and a catalyst, it removes the residual oxygen within the package.

When buying foods in MAP or vacuum packs, as with any packaging, it's important to choose products that are tightly sealed and avoid leaking packages.

Check the date

Date-marking provides a guide to the shelf life of a food, and is based on either the quality attributes of the food or health and safety considerations. It indicates the length of time a food should keep before it begins to deteriorate or, in some cases, before the food becomes less nutritious or unsafe. In Australia there are two main types of date marking:

- A **best-before** date is the last date on which you can expect a food to retain all of its quality attributes, provided it has been stored according to any stated storage conditions and the package is unopened. Quality attributes include things such as colour, taste, texture, flavour and freshness. A food that has passed its best-before date may still be perfectly safe to eat, but its quality may have diminished.
- A **use-by** date is the last date on which the food may be eaten safely, provided it has been stored appropriately and the package is unopened. After this date, the food should not be eaten for health and safety reasons.

Use by
The last date on which the food may be safely eaten

Best before
May be safe to eat, but quality may have lessened by this time

The Australian Food Standards Code outlines which dates apply to different foods, and offers guidance to manufacturers on how to calculate the shelf life.

When good foods go bad...

If a food hasn't been handled, processed, packaged or stored correctly, or you keep it past its use-by date, there's a chance it will be contaminated with bacteria. Some bacteria cause food to spoil, becoming slimy with off odours and flavours, but these spoilage bacteria, such as *Pseudomonas*, are generally harmless.

Food-poisoning bacteria, on the other hand, don't always change the smell, taste or appearance of food, but if consumed can make you very ill. Common food-poisoning bacteria include *Salmonella*, *Campylobacter jejuni*, *Staphylococcus aureus*, certain strains of *E. coli* and *Listeria monocytogenes* – the latter presenting a particular hazard for pregnant women and their unborn babies, the elderly and people with compromised immune systems.

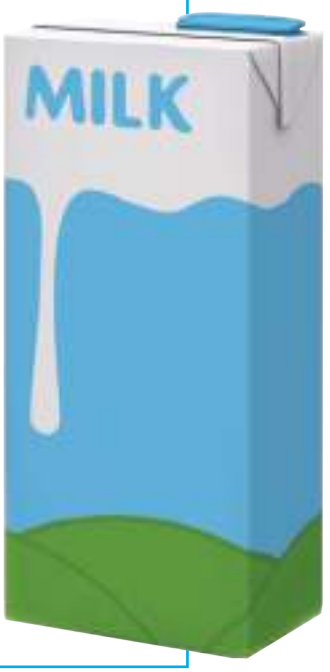
In the past 12 months, 28% of all government food recalls in Australia were because the products were found to be contaminated with food-poisoning bacteria. The recalled foods included various types of cheese, milk, mayonnaise-based spinach dips, juice drinks, salad sprouts, liver pate and smoked mussels.

28%
of food recalls in Australia in the past 12 months were because the products were found to be contaminated with food-poisoning bacteria*

*SOURCE: ACCC

What's UHT?

Ultra-high temperature (UHT) processing heats food to very high temperatures (130-150°C) for a short time, and often for only a few seconds. It's most commonly associated with milk, although it's also used for fruit juices and soups, and can impart a 'cooked' flavour to milk. If packaged under sterile conditions, UHT milk is shelf-stable and can be stored for months without refrigeration – although it must be chilled once opened. ■



Entries close soon – submit your Shonky today!

Expose a Shonky and WIN!

CHOICE's annual Shonky Awards are back

We're looking to name and shame companies that take advantage of Aussie consumers. Do you know of a product that's been falsely advertised or is just a complete rip-off? Have you experienced shockingly bad service?

EXPOSE them & you could win a brand new iPad Air!*

Share your Shonky at choice.com.au/expose-a-shonky

SHONKYS

**For competition terms and conditions, see* choice.com.au/expose-a-shonky

Price check

Unit pricing is supposed to help you look past the marketing and see what you're really paying, but the **Queensland Consumers' Association** says you need to look closely to find the best deal

Tricky packaging and labels are a big part of how businesses sell products these days, and the tactic can make value-for-money comparisons hard.

It's not an issue with unpackaged products like meats, seafoods, cheese, and fruits and vegetables, where pricing is based on a clear-cut dollar-per-kilogram approach. But packaged goods come in a dizzying array of brands, shapes, sizes and colours that aren't designed to make clear how much you're getting per dollar spent.

That's where unit pricing (or price per unit of measure) comes in. In theory, it allows you to look past the marketing and make easy cost comparisons. Large supermarkets such as Woolies and Coles (or any store of more than 1000 square metres) and online stores have been required to provide the unit price for packaged grocery items since 2009, thanks to the compulsory Unit Pricing Code. CHOICE had long campaigned for a uniform national system, and we endorsed the code's introduction.

Code of conduct

The code requires that the unit price be:

- **prominent** – it must stand out so that it is easily seen
- in **close proximity to the selling price** for the grocery item
- **legible** – it must not be difficult to read
- **unambiguous** – the information must be accurate and its meaning must be clear.

10,000
SQUARE METRES
minimum size of stores that must show unit pricing

While the 2009 legislation was a big win for consumers, calculating and comparing unit prices can still take some doing. And the retailers don't make it easy. Unit prices are supposed to be both prominent and legible, but they often aren't.

Even so, a recent shopping excursion by the Queensland Consumers' Association (QCA) proved that taking the time to find the unit prices and make the comparisons can really pay off:

- Fresh chillies can cost $125 per kilogram when bought in a 20g pack, but only $9 per kilogram when purchased loose.
- A national brand of cornflakes can cost $1.13 per 100g in a small pack, but only 38c per 100g in a large pack.
- One brand of paracetamol tablets in a 20-tablet pack can cost 16c per tablet, while another brand costs just 4c per tablet.

You don't have to be a maths whiz to figure out that these kinds of price differences can have a major impact on your household grocery costs in the long term.

Sure, you might pick a product with a higher unit price because it tastes, feels or looks better, or is in a more convenient pack size. But understanding the concept of unit pricing is important if you're keen on getting value for money.

Woolworths pricing display

Aldi pricing

This confusing Woolworths display has room for improvement

TOP 10 TIPS ON HOW TO SHOP BY UNIT PRICING

1 BRANDS

Compare the unit prices of different brands of the same product. Differences between brands are often large. And look out for special offers, which might temporarily lower unit prices (see tip 3).

2 PACK SIZES

Look at the unit price of other sizes of a brand and other brands. The unit price of large packs is usually much lower than small or medium-size packs. But watch out for exceptions and special offers. On the other hand, it doesn't make sense to buy bigger packs if there's more than you'll be able to use and some ends up wasted.

3 SPECIAL OFFERS

Compare the unit prices of special offers with the regular price of the same product or with other brands and sizes. You may have to search on the shelf label or price sign for the unit price of the special offer as this information can be hard to find. But it's worth making the comparison, because there may be an identical or similar product, or a different pack size available at an even lower unit price.

4 LOOSE OR PREPACKED PRODUCTS

If a product is available loose or pre-packaged, check the unit price of both. Often the unit price of the loose product will be much lower than the packaged product, although there can be permanent and temporary exceptions. Products available both loose and pre-packed include meat, fish, cheese, and fruit and vegetables.

5 ELABORATE PACKAGING

Compare the unit prices of products in elaborate packaging to those in simpler packaging (e.g. a spice bottle with a nifty pouring spout, or a basic plastic pouch). Generally, the simpler pack will have the lower unit price. Products available in both kinds of packaging include dried herbs and spices, dried fruit, soft drinks, coffee, and processed fruit.

6 SUB-PACKS

If a product is available in sub-packs (e.g. individual servings/sachets within a pack) as well as just in a single pack, compare the unit prices – the unit price for the product in sub-packs is usually much higher. Products typically available in sub-packs or single packs include juices, soft drinks, yoghurt, dried fruit, and breakfast oats.

7 PRODUCTS IN DIFFERENT FORMS

Check the unit prices of the same product when it's sold in different forms, such as both fresh and frozen. The frozen product may have a lower unit price or you may be able to freeze the low-priced fresh product yourself. Products often available in different forms include chilled/frozen meat and fish, fresh/frozen/canned vegetables, fresh/frozen/canned fruit, and ground coffee or coffee beans.

8 SUBSTITUTE AND ALTERNATIVE PRODUCTS

Close substitutes and alternatives are available for many products, so keep an eye out for them and check out their unit prices as well as those you normally buy. Products that often have close substitutes or alternatives include fruit and vegetables, meat, fish, and cheese.

9 PRODUCTS IN DIFFERENT PARTS OF A STORE

If a product is sold in more than one section of the supermarket, check the unit prices wherever the product is sold. There can be big differences in unit prices on products sold in different aisles or areas. Products typically sold in several parts of a supermarket can include meat, fish, cheese, nuts, and fruit and vegetables.

10 UNIT PRICES AT DIFFERENT STORES

Unit prices can vary greatly between stores so it pays to compare them and give your business to the stores that offer the best value. Unit prices must be provided in printed advertisements and for online stores. By using this information, and knowing the unit price you normally pay for an item, you can easily make comparisons between the different stores in your area as well as online.

How much can you save?

The QCA reduced the total cost of 33 common packaged grocery items by 43% – from $131 to $74 – by buying the brand with the lowest unit price rather than a popular national brand of each item. Most were basic products of identical or similar quality, and in similarly sized packs.

In another exercise, the Association found unit prices of 20 packaged national brand items were reduced by an average of 28% when they chose the large rather than the medium-sized pack.

The lesson? Wherever possible, try to focus on the unit price, not the selling price, when comparing products or weighing up a bargain, and make sure you know where to find the unit price on shelf labels and other price signs.

To complain about inadequate unit pricing, or for more information, call the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission's Unit Pricing Hotline on 1300 746 245. ■

IMAGES: SHUTTERSTOCK

Ask the Experts

Got a niggling question our team can help with?

Q I bought a Bush Horizon digital radio from Dick Smith. I checked with a staff member that it could receive AM and FM radio via DAB, important as it was for my house in the Blue Mountains, and ABC Local broadcasts bushfire information in summer.

At home, I discovered I was outside the DAB reception area. The radio's manual mentions this possibility in small print at the back. The packaging says in small letters to use their online postcode checker, but there was no warning on the unpackaged display model. Even though I specifically asked the store attendant about receiving AM stations, I was not alerted to any limitation of DAB. Does this qualify for a refund under "fit for purpose"?

Meredith Cridland

A CHOICE Consumer rights adviser, Meredith Cridland replies: You had a purpose in mind when you went shopping for your new radio, and you made this known to the staff at Dick Smith. You wanted a radio that would receive AM and FM stations via DAB. The fact that DAB has limited coverage is important and should have been disclosed when you were deciding whether to buy it. The information on the box wasn't brought to your attention, and you weren't in a position to see it until you had already bought it.

I suggest you return the radio to the store, along with your receipt, and ask for a refund. Mention the Australian Consumer Law (ACL) and its consumer guarantee about fitness for purpose.

Q I have a Samsung Google Nexus S smartphone bought in July 2011. When I'm using and switching apps, it takes about five seconds to take effect. I've used Windows Disk Defragmenter to defragment the hard drive. Afterwards, response time improves for a few days before the lag returns. Could it be due to old phone hardware, updating of apps requiring more of the phone's limited RAM, or having over 4GB of hard drive used (total storage is 16GB)? Could it be engineered obsolescence?

Denis Gallagher

A CHOICE Digital home content producer Denis Gallagher replies: Firstly, on the 4GB of space, this is not an issue; if you have 12GB of space this is a huge buffer for the apps to operate comfortably. (There's no hard drive in your phone – it's all flash memory.) Sometimes the app may want to use more of your RAM and that may be an issue, but I'm guessing the biggest issue is that the latest OS is too much for the phone's processor.

This is Google's flagship phone and was a great phone in 2011. However, I believe it shouldn't have been allowed to upgrade from Gingerbread (2.3) to JellyBean (4.2). There are many examples where Android smartphone makers refuse to allow a model to be upgraded to the latest Android OS, the reasons often being an inability to handle the increased hardware and RAM demands.

If you haven't done so already, I would carry out a factory reset to see if that helps.

nexus

Q I want to buy a new TV from 42" upwards that can do "picture in picture" (PIP) where one picture is from a free-to-air channel and the other picture is from my Foxtel box. I would also want to swap between the two feeds. This means the TV is taking a signal simultaneously from the Foxtel box HDMI leads and from the 75 ohm TV aerial. Which models can do that?

Chris Ruggles

A CHOICE Digital Home team lead Chris Ruggles responds: Four Samsung TVs from our test (see page 46) support PIP, with some restrictions.

UA48H5000AW
UA48H6400AW
UA55H8000AW
UA55HU9000W

According to the Samsung manual:

- PIP cannot be used while Smart Hub or 3D is active.
- Turning off the TV automatically disables PIP.
- Playing a game or using the karaoke feature on the main screen can result in lower PIP picture quality.
- For PIP to work, the main screen's source must be component or HDMI and the input resolution must be less than Full HD (1080p). The sub-screen supports digital channels, analog channels, and AV only. However, analog channels and AV may not be supported depending on the country or model.

Ask us!

Do you have a question for one of CHOICE's experts? Email us at **asktheexperts@choice.com.au** or write to us at:
Ask the Experts, CHOICE,
57 Carrington Rd, Marrickville,
NSW 2204.
We regret that we cannot reply to all correspondence.

COMPILED BY SIOBAHN DONOHOE

Tests

Our seasonal gardening special, plus fridges, dryers, TVs and more

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We line up the crisp new crop of HDTVs

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Tried and tested for drying time and efficiency

How high? Turn to page 46 to see all the best new TVs defined

IMAGE: SHUTTERSTOCK

We get up close and personal with ultra HD televisions

CHOICE

CHOICE'S experienced technical staff puts products through their paces in our own testing laboratories. We use test methods based on Australian standards and develop our own to match the way consumers use a product in their homes. We buy the products we test, maintaining our independence from manufacturers and so we know what you're faced with in the shops. We've checked the models are available at the time we publish. Our recommendations are based on a product's quality and performance, with no hidden bias.

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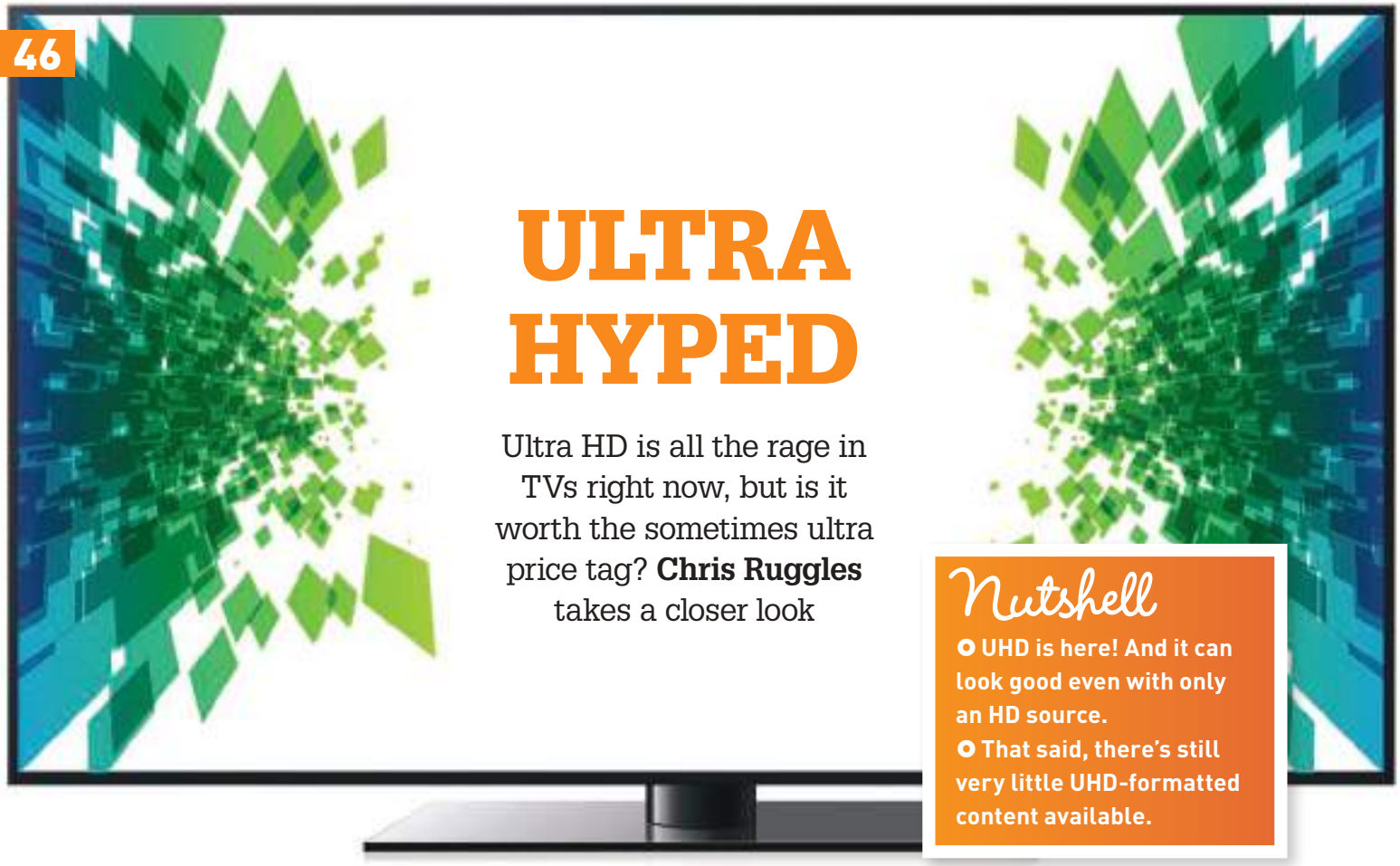


ULTRA HYPED

Ultra HD is all the rage in TVs right now, but is it worth the sometimes ultra price tag? **Chris Ruggles** takes a closer look

Nutshell

- UHD is here! And it can look good even with only an HD source.
- That said, there's still very little UHD-formatted content available.

The TV industry has latched onto Ultra High Definition (UHD), sometimes called 4K TVs, as the next big thing that will convince you to upgrade your current model. So you can expect many breathless celebrities extolling the benefits of more pixels in the next year or so.

Until now we've been unimpressed with the UHD screens we've seen in our lab. Their picture quality was often compromised by poor upscaling, even with Blu-ray movies. However, the Samsung UA55HU9000W in this test proves that this technology may have a future after all. It's a good overall performer, and its picture quality with anything over standard definition is impressive. And the **LG 55UB850T,** also a UHD TV, only just misses out on our recommended list, mainly because it shows some softness in its upscaling and, like the Samsung, it's not so easy to use.

We'll be testing more UHD TVs from the other major brands in the next few months, along with our usual coverage of HD TVs in many sizes.

			PERFORMANCE							
	Screen size (cm)	Price ($)	Overall score (%)	Broadcast picture quality score (%)	DVD/SD picture quality score (%)	Blu-ray picture quality score (%)	Ease of use score (%)	Sound quality score (%)	Energy score (%)	Viewing angle score (%)
LG 55LB7500	139	2490	75	82	73	90	55	70	84	90
• **Samsung** UA55HU9000W	139	4380	75	82	74	90	56	78	65	80
LG 50LB5820	126	1360	73	73	69	80	68	73	81	80
• **Samsung** UA55H8000AW	139	3375	73	78	69	85	56	72	80	90
• **LG** 42LB6500	106	1149	72	76	75	85	52	67	78	80
Samsung UA55H6400AW	140	1700	70	74	61	80	59	75	82	70
Sony KDL-60W850B	152	2660	70	70	62	75	68	81	78	65
• **LG** 55UB850T	139	2770	69	73	66	80	53	74	69	80
• **LG** 50LB6500	127	1580	68	71	68	75	52	69	80	80
LG 60LB5610	151	2100	67	68	65	60	66	76	85	60
• **Samsung** UA48H6400AW	121	1540	67	70	58	75	56	76	79	80
• **LG** 50LB5610	127	1145	61	59	45	60	66	67	81	90
• **Samsung** UA48H5000AW	121	1125	61	57	46	60	65	78	75	70
TEAC LES5572F3D	140	1449	61	60	60	55	53	65	76	90
Kogan KALED55UHDZA	140	999	58	67	50	55	52	64	75	55
TEAC LES6572F3D	165	2199	51	51	32	55	53	56	82	70

USING THE TABLE Prices are indicative only. **Scores** The overall score is made up of broadcast TV (25%), DVD (20%), Blu-ray (15%), sound quality half-centimetre, with the base attached and all protruding parts included. Power cord and connecting cables are excluded. **TABLE NOTES** • Newly

WHAT TO BUY

75%
Samsung UA55HU9000W

Good points
- Very good HD broadcast picture and viewing angle scores
- Good sound quality score
- Sports are good in HD

Bad points
- The small remote is mainly a pointing device similar to a computer mouse; many functions are via on-screen menus, which could make it very difficult for people with some disabilities to use

IMAGE: SHUTTERSTOCK

73%
Samsung UA55H8000AW

Good points
- Very good energy use
- Excellent viewing angle score
- Sports are good in HD

Bad points
- Remote has small, tightly spaced buttons and some labels have little contrast, making them hard to read in poor light

72%
LG 42LB6500

Good points
- Sports are good in HD
- Very good viewing angle score

Bad points
- Remote has small, tightly spaced buttons and some labels have little contrast, making them hard to read in poor light
- Motion artefacts (pixelated halos) around moving players in wide shots when viewing SD sports footage
- Voice control has a noticeable pause before execution

				FEATURES						SPECIFICATIONS								
DVR score (%)	EPG score (%)	Smart TV score (%)	3D score (%)	4K TV	Stand swivel	Bluetooth	Wi-Fi	DLNA	Browser	Screen resolution (pixels)	Screen finish	Weight with stand (kg)	Dimensions (cm, H x W x D)	Energy stars	Annual energy use (kWh)**	HDMI (total / easy access)	Country of manufacture	Contact
78	65	71	70			✓	✓	✓	✓	1920 x 1080	Semi gloss	19.6	76.5 x 123 x 24	6	232	3 / 0	South Korea	lg.com/au
76	70	77	75	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	3840 x 2160	Gloss	25.6	76 x 124 x 31	3	528	4 / 4	Mexico	samsung.com/au
76	70	73	na				✓	✓	✓	1920 x 1080	Semi gloss	14.2	71 x 113 x 25.5	6	214	3 / 0	South Korea	lg.com/au
74	70	77	75			✓	✓	✓	✓	1920 x 1080	Gloss	18.9	76 x 124 x 24	5.5	279	4 / 4	Mexico	samsung.com/au
77	65	74	70			✓	✓	✓	✓	1920 x 1080	Semi gloss	9.9	61 x 96 x 21	5.5	181	3 / 0	Indonesia	lg.com/au
76	90	80	75		✓		✓	✓	✓	1920 x 1080	Semi gloss	18.2	79 x 124.5 x 32	6	253	4 / 2	Malaysia	samsung.com/au
74	80	53	70			✓	✓	✓		1920 x 1080	Semi gloss	34.7	84.5 x 137 x 32.5	5.5	354	4 / 1	Malaysia	sony.com.au
78	65	74	55	✓		✓	✓		✓	3840 x 2160	Gloss	22.4	77 x 124 x 26	4	420	4 / 4	Korea	lg.com/au
78	65	74	75			✓	✓	✓	✓	1920 x 1080	Semi gloss	14.3	71 x 113 x 23	6	224	3 / 0	Indonesia	lg.com/au
na	70	na	na							1920 x 1080	Semi gloss	23.5	86 x 137.5 x 27.5	6	261	2 / 0	Korea	lg.com/au
76	70	77	70		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	1920 x 1080	Semi gloss	13.6	71 x 109 x 31	5.5	221	4 / 2	Malaysia	samsung.com/au
58	70	0	0							1920 x 1080	Semi gloss	14.1	71 x 113 x 25	6	220	2 / 0	Indonesia	lg.com/au
0	70	0	0							1920 x 1080	Semi gloss	11.9	67.5 x 107.5 x 20.5	5	258	2 / 2	Malaysia	samsung.com/au
40	20	41	55				✓	✓	✓	1920 x 1080	Semi gloss	24	78.5 x 124.5 x 27.5	5	323	4 / 0	China	teac.com.au
36	20	41	55	✓			✓	✓	✓	3840 x 2160	Semi gloss	26.5	76.5 x 122.5 x 31.5	5	339	4 / 1	China	kogan.com/au/
40	20	41	60				✓	✓	✓	1920 x 1080	Semi gloss	38.5	90 x 145.5 x 33.5	6	341	4 / 0	China	teac.com.au

(10%), ease of use (20%) energy (5%) and viewing angle (5%). All models in this test are LCD TVs with LED backlighting **Dimensions** are rounded up to the next centimetre or tested. ** Energy use based on 10 hours' use and 14 hours on standby per day. **na** Not applicable.

Do you need UHD?

The short answer is no. There's very little 4K-formatted content available right now, and even if there's more in the near future, it'll probably be limited to major movie releases and stuff you've shot yourself.

The fact is, a screen with more and smaller pixels just means you can sit closer to it. They don't necessarily add up to a better picture. UHD screens tend to be priced at the top end of the market, and manufacturers are putting their best processors and other smarts into these TVs. So by purchasing a UHD TV you're really paying for a TV that can do a better job of processing the image. This is necessary because you'll be watching standard definition most of the time, and the screen has to convert it to its native 3840 x 2160 pixel format. Even the best TVs struggle with this.

PREVIOUSLY RECOMMENDED TVs (*CHOICE*, JUL 14)

75% LG 55LB7500, $2490
73% LG 50LB5820, $1360
70% Samsung UA55H6400AW, $1700
70% Sony KDL-60W850B, $2660

Score changes

Eagle-eyed readers might notice we've made some slight changes to a couple of scores since our last test published in *CHOICE*, Jul 14. These are just minor tweaks to the scoring system to take into account the ever-more-complicated Smart TV and EPG functions. The differences are small and don't affect the overall rankings.

What to look for

- Easy-to-access sockets allow you to get to the connections for DVD players, cable TV and other devices, particularly if you plan to mount the TV on a wall.
- Look for a remote control that's easy to read, with large, well-spaced buttons and clear labels.
- On-screen menus should be easy to read and understand without having to resort to the manual.
- Check that the input connections on the TV match the outputs on the devices you want to hook up to it – such as a DVD player/recorder, cable TV or game console – and that there are enough connections for all the devices you want to attach at the same time.
- When connecting an external USB hard drive to your TV to use the DVR function, make sure it's correctly formatted. Some TVs will require the drive to be formatted by the TV, while others may want you to format it using a computer. Most TVs will not record directly to a USB stick.

ABOUT THE REST

Both the **LG 55UB850T** and **50LB6500** just miss out on being recommended. The 55UB850T is a UHD screen, but neither TV handles sports footage well in high or standard definition. The **LG60LB5610** is very good for energy use and has good sound quality, but there are motion artefacts around moving players in SD and HD sports, and it has only two HDMI ports.

The **Samsung UA48H6400AW** doesn't handle sport well. High-definition sports have some flaring and edge noise in wide and midrange shots, whereas SD sport is pixelated and breaks up.

The **LG 50LB5610** and **Samsung UA48H5000AW** are relatively inexpensive, but only have two HDMI ports and sport viewing is poor with HD – players tend to blend into each other in SD on both TVs.

The relatively cheap **Kogan** is a UHD TV, but its image quality is borderline, except for broadcast HD where it's OK. SD sports suffer from motion artefacts as much as the less expensive LG and Samsung models, and it's not much better with HD sports. Its DVR and EPG are very difficult to use.

Both **TEAC**s are very poor for SD and poor for HD sports viewing. Their DVR is difficult to use and the EPG is very limited. ■

MUSIC ON THE MOVE

Wireless speakers allow you to enjoy your music anywhere in your home, as well as when you're out and about. And **Denis Gallagher** finds they offer surprisingly good sound quality, too

If you see yourself as an audiophile, you probably have a music system costing several thousand dollars with components and speakers that deliver fantastic quality audio. So let's be clear from the outset – none of the wireless speakers in this test will come close to giving you the same audio experience. But you also won't be dragging your mega-quality system with you when you travel, or go out into the garden or down to the beach.

While there's no escaping the fact that a good larger set of speakers can deliver a better listening experience, many of the wireless speakers tested nevertheless deliver surprisingly good audio. All you need is one of these speakers and a Bluetooth device such as a smartphone or iPod with your music collection, and you're good to go.

Features found on several of these models that you may find useful include microphone support, which allows you to use your mobile as a speakerphone, and a USB output connection to recharge your phone on the go. None of the speakers tested support Apple AirPlay (see What to Look For, page 52) over a Wi-Fi network. If you want this feature, expect to pay $500 or more for the privilege.

Some of the wireless speakers tested offer extra features and functionality such as stereo separation (Braven, Logitech and Beats by Dre), which can be useful if you want to use your speakers as part of a small mini sound system set-up.

Nutshell

- You can get good, but not great, quality music on the go with most of the speakers tested.
- Some models allow you to hook up two speakers to create a nifty mini home system using the music collection on your smartphone.

IMAGE: SHUTTERSTOCK

WHAT TO BUY

84%
Klipsch KMC1

The KMC1 looks like it should be in the restaurant booth on *Happy Days*, with eight loud retro colours to match your decor. The touch capacitive controls for volume, Bluetooth connection and accepting an incoming phone call are clear and easy to read, although not as easy to select as a physical button. At 1.5 kg, this is a hefty unit for a portable speaker and not one to put in your coat pocket. However, it's compact enough to be used as a bookshelf speaker or packed in the car for a road trip or picnic. Excellent battery performance and the ability to charge smart devices plugged into its powered USB port make the Klipsch a handy travelling companion.

82%
Braven 850

The 850 is a solid brick of a speaker with an industrial metal design. The ability to add another Braven 850 speaker for true stereo separation is good for creating a wireless mini hi-fi at home, although this costs an extra $400. Set-up is simple using a Bluetooth connection and the volume, wireless Bluetooth, power on/off and play/pause buttons are clearly shown at the top of the speaker next to the mic for the speakerphone. The side panel shows a battery indicator button together with the aux-in and power cable port. The powered USB port can be used to charge smartphones, and the battery life should deliver enough music for a full day out.

81%
Bose SoundLink Mini

The diminutive Soundlink Mini delivers great sound at reasonably high levels, and you can easily fit it in your backpack or coat pocket. Controls are clearly marked at the top of the unit and the ability to remember the last six paired devices (without having to go through the connection process every time) makes it a great option for a family or shared household with several different tablets, phones, iPods etc. It's a shame it lacks a universal USB power adapter as it means yet another dedicated power pack needs to be taken when travelling. Also, the lack of an on-board mic means you can't use it as a speakerphone.

		PERFORMANCE							FEATURES							
	Price ($)	Overall score (%)	Listening score (%)	Range score (%)	Battery score (%)	Ease of use score (%)	Connectivity score (%)	Battery time (rounded to nearest hour)	Apps available	FWD/RWD	Play/pause	Battery life indicator	USB port type micro B	NFC	Speaker phone	USB can charge other devices
Klipsch KMC1	399	84	76	87	95	87	90	29				✓		✓	✓	✓
Braven 850	399	82	73	87	95	84	85	27		✓	✓	✓			✓	✓
Bose SoundLink Mini	249	81	82	80	75	82	88	14					✓(B)			
Logitech UE Boom	199	81	70	87	95	83	88	30	✓			✓(A)	✓	✓	✓	
Bose Soundlink III	399	80	73	87	85	83	88	17				✓	✓(B)			
Klipsch Gig	269	79	64	93	95	82	90	25				✓	✓		✓	
Marley Get Together	249	79	71	87	85	88	88	17								✓
Sony SRS-X5	279	78	72	87	75	87	88	11						✓	✓	✓
Harman Kardon Esquire	299	77	74	70	85	88	88	21			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	(C)
JBL Charge	199	77	68	93	75	86	90	15				✓	✓			✓
Jabra Solemate Max	299	76	60	87	95	84	88	25	✓	✓	✓	✓(A)	✓	✓	✓	✓
Braven 855S	399	75	58	87	95	84	88	27		✓	✓	✓			✓	✓
JBL Pulse	249	74	62	93	75	84	90	15	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	
Soen Transit	249	72	68	80	65	85	88	10					✓		✓	
Cambridge Audio Minx GO	249	69	63	61	75	88	88	13								✓(D)
Beats by Dre Pill 2.0	259	62	47	80	65	79	88	8		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓

81%
Logitech UE Boom

The Ultimate Ears (UE) Boom is small enough to put in your pocket. It's easy to control using your mobile or Bluetooth music device and it delivers good-quality audio. The can-like shape has an outer casing that's rugged enough to deal with bumps and and wear and tear. The UE Boom app (for iPhone or Android smartphones) enables audio levels to be altered to suit small rooms, outdoors, etc. and you can also set the speaker up as an alarm. You can pair two UE Boom speakers to deliver stereo, and our listening panel found this effect turned a good single speaker into a very good pair of stereo speakers.

IMAGE: SHUTTERSTOCK

80%
Bose Soundlink III

The Soundlink III is an incremental update that began with the original Soundlink LX we tested in 2012, followed by an improved Soundlink II last year. The same familiar metallic minimalist Bose design (with five different colours for the optional protective case) will deliver your music with a similar big boomy sound that belies the unit's size. If you liked the sound of the Soundlink II, you'll also like this version. All the controls for power, connectivity and volume control are clearly marked at the top of the unit and the ability to remember the last six devices it connected to makes it a good device for a family or shared household.

				SPECIFICATIONS		
Pair with additional speaker for stereo	Carry bag	Carry handle	Dust/water resistant	Dimensions (cm, H x W x D)	Weight (kg)	Contact
				11 x 26 x 8.5	1.57	klipsch.com.au
✓				10 x 24 x 7	1.51	braven.com
				6 x 18 x 6	0.66	global.bose.com
✓	✓		✓	7 x 18 (E)	0.53	ultimateears.com
				13 x 25.5 x 4.5	1.36	global.bose.com
	✓	✓		9 x 18 x 5.5	0.63	klipsch.com
				13 x 40 x 8	2.46	houseofmarley.com.au
				12 x 22 x 5	1.20	sony.com.au
	✓			14.7 x 14.7 x 4.7	0.75	harmankardon.com
	✓			7.5 x 17.5 (E)	0.46	ehifi.com.au
		✓	✓	14 x 33 x 100	2.79	jabra.com.au
✓			✓	11 x 25.0 x 7.5	1.81	braven.com
				7 x 18.2 (E)	0.51	ehifi.com.au
				9.5 x 17 x 3.5	0.46	store.apple.com/au
	✓			12 x 24 x 6	1.10	cambridgeaudio.com
✓	✓			5 x 19.3 (E)	0.30	beatsbydre.com

USING THE TABLE Scores The overall score is made up of listening performance (45%), range (wireless) performance (20%), battery performance (20%), ease of use (10%) and Bluetooth connectivity (5%). **Price** As at August 2014. **TABLE NOTES (A)** Audio indication of battery life. **(B)** Micro USB port is for service only. **(C)** While the Harman Kardon speaker lacks the ability to charge devices, the power adapter has two additional full size USB connections to power smaller devices such as smartphones as well as tablet devices. **(D)** Although the USB connection will charge a smartphone, the speaker will only do so if it is powered from a power point, not from battery power. **(E)** First measurement = diameter. All models connect wirelessly via Bluetooth and all have a 3.5mm aux-in port. No models tested support Apple's AirPlay over a Wi-Fi network, rather they connect to the music device (smartphone or iPod) via a Bluetooth connection. **NFC** Near-field communication.

ABOUT THE REST

The **Klipsch Gig** is less than half the size of the top-performing Klipsch KMC1, with small audio performance to match. However, it has an excellent range and great battery life.

The **Marley** is not that portable, and would feel more at home parked semi-permanently on a bedroom bookcase; likewise the **Jabra**. And though packed with features and good music player controls on-board, its audio quality left our listening panel underwhelmed.

The **Harman Kardon** is thin and square, with a leather back and metal grill. While it can't power devices from its USB port, the included power adapter has a very useful double USB port connection to power a tablet and a phone at the same time.

The **Sony** is a solid brick design with good audio performance, and support for aptX coding (for CD-quality audio) if supported by the device you pair it with.

The **Cambridge** delivers OK audio performance, but the lack of USB power adapter, speakerphone or ability to charge devices away from a power point may be an issue for some users.

The **Beats by Dre** is packed with features and is easy to use, but delivers a thin sound, and none of the warmth and presence delivered by other more diminutive speakers.

The **Braven 855S** is the ruggedised, splashproof version of the Braven 850, with identical internal components. However, compared to the 850, we found the audio to be more boomy and muffled, with a hollow sound.

The **Soen** is no larger than a paperback novel and the equal-second-lightest speaker tested, yet still delivers reasonable audio quality.

The **JBL Pulse** delivers a range of flashing coloured disco lights while playing, while the **Charge** is simpler in design but includes the ability to recharge a smartphone using a USB output connection.

What to look for

Bluetooth is a very simple connection in most cases because it's direct from one device to another. While the claimed range is usually limited to around 10 metres, our testers found the figure to be much larger. In our 'straight line' tests, we achieved up to 30 metres, and even in tests where there were obstructions such as a brick wall or solid-core doors, our tester comfortably played music more than 10 metres from the device.

AirPlay can connect a number of devices over a Wi-Fi network using Apple devices. It can also send the uncompressed audio file, which may help deliver better sound quality for some high-end speakers, although the improved quality may not be noticeable with most wireless speakers. The big advantage with AirPlay over Bluetooth is the range, with an AirPlay device's range limited only by the range of the Wi-Fi network, which could be well over 30 metres. No speaker in this test supports Wi-Fi or AirPlay.

On-board controls are generally fairly limited with wireless speakers, as the music-playing device tends to handle most of the song selections, volume control and track selections. However, some controls on the speaker for moving to the next track, or at least pausing and playing, can be useful.

Aux-in An auxiliary input allows the use of media players that don't connect via Wi-Fi or Bluetooth such as a CD player or a direct output from a computer soundcard. All models in the latest test have an aux-in port using a standard 3.5mm cable connection.

USB may behave like an aux-in for some players, but sometimes it's only there for firmware upgrades, such as for the Bose models. The other models in this test with a micro USB connection use the port for charging, with some models also able to charge smartphones and other devices using an additional full-sized USB port.

Dust/water resistance can be a handy feature to help extend the life of your wireless speaker because it's likely that you'll be taking these portable devices outside. The Logitech UE Boom, Jabra Solemate Max and Braven 885S have an IPX3 or IPX4 rating, which basically means they can cope with some splashing water and rough treatment.

How we test

Listening performance scores are based on our listening panel's appraisal of classical and rock/pop music tracks. The speaker is positioned about two metres away from the listener, with the panel assessing overall quality.

Ease of use Our tester, Norbert Suto, appraises the clarity and accuracy of the manuals supplied, ease of setting up the speaker itself as well as connecting it to a wireless source and sending music to the speaker.

Range Our tester places each speaker in an identical position to assess the point at which a music signal is lost or the audio quality drops. Three measurements were taken, including an unobstructed straight line test, obstructed test with up to three solid doors and a test through a brick wall. The results are averaged to calculate an overall range score.

Battery testing is carried out with a constant music source connected to the unit through the auxiliary input. So the times we were able to achieve may be longer than the claimed times, but give an indication of their comparative battery capacity performance. ■

Lay waste to waste

Matthew Steen explains how to avoid the common wastage traps lurking in your fridge

Nutshell

- Five new fridges tested, one of which we recommend.
- How long you leave the fridge door open makes a big difference to your energy bill.

Whether or not you're expecting a large windfall from the carbon price repeal, it's worth thinking about how you can really make a difference to your fridge's energy bill.

That old fridge out the back

Chances are it's a lot less efficient than your current one, and is expensive to run. If you desperately want to hold onto it, turn it off at the wall when not in use and save yourself the energy bill pain.

Leaving the door open

Opening and closing your door multiple times for extended periods can expend 50-120kWh per year. That's an extra $15 to $30 per year floating away on cold air. We did an experiment of our own, and found an increase of up to 14% in running costs.

Get the most out of your food

Want your foods to last to their use-by dates? Find out where it's colder and warmer in your fridge with a fridge thermometer from your local homewares retailer. Store food items that could pose a greater health risk if they're stored at an incorrect temperature in the cold areas, and use warmer areas for lower-risk ones.

Fresh food drawers

Modern fridges have basic humidity controls that claim to make our fruits and veggies last longer. In crisper drawers, this means you can use high humidity settings for most vegetables, particularly for those that wilt. Use **high humidity** settings for carrots, leafy greens, spinach, rocket, basil and broccoli. Use **low humidity** settings for fruits and vegetables that tend to break down and rot – pears, apples, grapes, mushrooms, capsicum and avocados.

Doorway to heat

A fridge's door is its warmest part. Use it for things such as condiments that don't require low temperatures, but avoid putting foods that are moderately perishable in it, including eggs (ignore the egg holders).

Packed to the rafters

It's a hard ask to get the balance right in your fridge. Too much food bunched together means the cold air won't cool it properly, so keep enough room between items for air to circulate. A bare fridge means you're essentially wasting energy on keeping a space cold for nothing until you do that next shop.

PREVIOUSLY RECOMMENDED

381-450L

* **Fisher & Paykel** E402BRE3 (A) (Mar 13)	$1639
* **Fisher & Paykel** E442BRE3 (A) (Mar 13)	$1589

451-525L

* **Fisher & Paykel** RF522WDRX1 (A) (Mar 13)	$2349
Fisher & Paykel E522BRE4 (A)	$1759

SIDE-BY-SIDE

LG GC-P197DPSL (Sep 12)	$1799

(A) Freezer on bottom.
* Replaced by an upgraded series (e.g. E402BRE4), which has only had the control panel moved to the front right panel.
(Month and year in brackets refers to the issue of *CHOICE* in which the fridge was first profiled)

IMAGE: SHUTTERSTOCK

WHAT TO BUY

525L and French door

80%

Haier HTD647RSS

Good points

- Excellent result for energy use
- Excellent range of temperatures available and very good freezer reserve
- Very good response to seasonal temperature change
- Has a chiller

Bad points

- Chiller is not as cold as it should be for safe storage of highly perishable food

USING THE TABLE Price Recommended retail, as of July 2014. Many fridges are available in other styles and finishes, at a different price. Some can also be built into cabinets with a door kit that matches your kitchen cupboards. **Scores** The overall score is made up of temperature performance (80%) and energy efficiency (20%). **Temperature performance** This score is made up of fluctuations (30%), range (25%), uniformity (20%), ambient change (20%) and recommended setting (5%). **Features** see What to Look For, *CHOICE*, May 14, page 49. **Energy efficiency** is based on the fridge's energy consumption, taking into account its size. **Noise level** These are comparative measurements taken 1m up and 1m away from the fridge during normal running. Fridges can sound noticeably louder as the compressor starts and stops and may make unusual noises during automatic defrosting. **Claimed volumes** This is how much air space the fridge has to cool; less space is available for storage. Use the volumes to get an idea of how big the freezer is compared with the fresh food compartment. **10-year running costs** are calculated at a rate of 26c/kWh. A 10-year period gives a useful indication of the long-term differences between high and low energy use – and you should expect your fridge to last at least this long. **TABLE NOTES** • Newly tested. **na** Not applicable – doors are side-by-side. **T** Top. **B** Bottom. **L** Left. **R** Right. **Rev** Reversible door. **(A)** Fisher & Paykel claims the only difference between the 3 series and 4 series currently available is the control panel being moved to the front right of the fridge **(B)** Variable temperature drawer can be set as a chiller. **(C)** This chiller was too warm in our tests for optimal storage of highly perishable foods. **(D)** Four half-width shelves.

		COSTS		PERFORMANCE				
		Price ($)	10-year running costs ($)	Overall score (%)	Freezer	Number of doors	Temperature performance score (%)	Fluctuation score (%)
<300L	**LG** GN-253VW	699	1097	65	T	2	61	45
	•**Westinghouse** WTB2800WC	899	931	61	T	2	55	60
	Haier HRFZ-213	499	933	53	T	2	45	65
	Haier HRF 224FW	499	931	51	T	2	43	45
	Samsung SR254MW	699	655	51	T	2	41	25
	•**LG** GN-205VW	599	1058	50	T	2	43	35
	Westinghouse WTM2000WC	619	796	47	T	2	37	35
	Fisher & Paykel E249TR	929	1087	43	T	2	34	0
300-380L	**LG** GC-306NP	999	978	79	B	2	77	80
	Kelvinator KBM3800WB-R	1109	1365	70	B	2	68	80
	Fisher & Paykel E331T	1049	1118	67	T	2	63	45
	Fisher & Paykel E381TRT2	999	1095	62	T	2	56	30
381-450 L	**Fisher & Paykel** E402BRE3 (A)	1639	1186	81	B	2	80	75
	Fisher & Paykel E442BRE3 (A)	1589	1284	81	B	2	80	75
	Westinghouse WBM4300WB	1629	1375	72	B	2	70	75
	Mitsubishi MR-C405C-W-A1	1199	1451	72	B	3	71	80
	Westinghouse WTM3900WB-R	1299	1110	69	T	2	65	60
	Kelvinator KTM4200WB-R	1279	1209	65	T	2	60	65
451-525 L	**Fisher & Paykel** RF522WDRX1 (A)	2349	1368	83	B	2	83	75
	Fisher & Paykel E522BRE4	1759	1456	81	B	2	81	90
	Electrolux EBM5100SC	1799	1043	74	B	2	70	70
	Electrolux EBM5107SC	2849	1097	74	B	2	71	70
	Westinghouse WBM5100WC	2019	1352	72	B	2	69	80
	Bosch KGN53X125A	1649	1196	71	B	2	67	90
	Panasonic NR-BW465VWAU	1499	1022	71	B	2	67	80
	Westinghouse WBE5100SC	2379	1396	71	B	2	68	55
	•**Electrolux** EBM5100SD	2539	1165	69	B	2	65	70
	LG GN-515GS	1449	1321	68	T	2	64	70
>525 & FRENCH DOOR	•**Haier** HTD647RSS	1999	1157	80	B	3	78	75
	Fisher & Paykel RF610ADUX3 (A)	3399	1643	76	B	3	74	55
	LG GR-L730SL	3599	1882	75	B	3	73	70
	•**Westinghouse** WHE5100SA-D	2479	1563	73	B	3	71	55
	Electrolux EHE5107SB	2929	1594	65	B	3	62	50
	Samsung SRF527DSLS	2299	1492	52	B	3	45	10
SIDE BY SIDE	**LG** GC-P197DPSL	1799	1609	81	L	2	81	90
	Daewoo FRS-U20ICW	1299	1729	74	L	2	72	60
	Westinghouse WSE6100WF	2219	1550	72	L	2	69	55
	Westinghouse WSE7000WF	2569	1708	64	L	2	59	45
	Samsung SRS600NLS	1999	1690	55	L	2	49	25
PIGEON PAIRS	**Westinghouse** WRM3700WB-R/WFM3600WB-L	3348	2080	71	na	2	73	65
	Fisher & Paykel E450R/E388LW	2998	2460	69	na	2	67	55
FRIDGE ONLY	**Westinghouse** WRM3700WB-R	1319	848	81	na	1	79	75
	Fisher & Paykel E450R	1499	879	78	na	1	75	75
	Fisher & Paykel C270R	929	980	66	na	1	62	70

To find out how we test fridges, go to **choice.com.au/fridges**

									FEATURES				SPECIFICATIONS							
Range score (%)	Uniformity score (%)	Ambient change score (%)	Recommended setting score (%)	Energy efficiency score (%)	Claimed / measured energy use (kWh per year)	Noise level (dB)	Brand reliability	Brand loyalty	Chiller	Dairy compartment	Rollers	All shelves removable at 90°	Dimensions (cm, H x W x D)	Claimed total volume (L)	Claimed volume, fresh food (L)	Claimed volume, freezer (L)	Crisper drawer	Fresh food shelves / shelf positions	Door hinge position	Contact
70	70	58	80	81	435 / 422	47	86	90	✓				161 x 54 x 60	253	179	74	1	2/4	R	lg.com.au
65	60	26	70	85	385 / 358	36	92	94	✓			✓	161 x 54 x 63	275	193	62	1	2/6	R	westinghouse.com.au
48	60	5	0	83	375 / 359	31	na	na			✓		144 x 55 x 58	213	172	41	1	3/8	R	haier.com.au
55	55	28	60	84	337 / 358	40	na	na	✓		✓	✓	142 x 55 x 64	224	153	71	1	2/3	R	haier.com.au
70	65	7	30	92	269 / 252	36	86	91	✓				155 x 56 x 64	255	184	71	1	2/3	R	samsung.com.au
70	55	35	50	80	395 / 407	35	86	90	✓				145 x 54 x 58	205	142	63	1	2/3	R	lg.com.au
70	50	15	40	87	360 / 306	37	92	94	✓		✓	✓	148 x 52 x 60	203	144	59	1	3/5	Rev	westinghouse.com.au
35	50	63	50	81	394 / 418	35	90	92		✓			160 x 53 x 58	248	191	57	1	3/11	R	fp.com.au
90	55	81	65	86	398 / 376	39	86	90				✓	174 x 60 x 65	306	185	121	1	2/4	R	lg.com.au
55	70	69	50	80	555 / 525	37	93	94		✓	✓		172 x 70 x 64	380	267	114	1	2/10	R	kelvinator.com.au
80	75	69	85	83	405 / 430	31	90	92		✓	✓		143 x 64 x 71	329	232	97	1	2/13	Rev	fp.com.au
85	75	70	70	85	417 / 421	30	90	92		✓	✓	✓	160 x 64 x 72	380	283	97	1	3/17	R	fp.com.au
90	70	86	75	84	505 / 456	31	90	92		✓	✓		170 x 64 x 72	403	280	123	2	3/17	R or L	fp.com.au
90	70	83	90	83	525 / 494	31	90	92		✓	✓		170 x 68 x 72	442	307	135	2	3/18	R or L	fp.com.au
85	55	66	50	81	530 / 529	37	92	94		✓	✓		172 x 71 x 71	431	300	131	1	3/10	R or L	westinghouse.com.au
65	50	83	90	76	515 / 558	31	na	na	✓		✓	✓	180 x 60 x 66	406	227	103	1	3/5	R	mitsubishielectric.com.au
85	70	38	75	85	450 / 427	37	92	94		✓	✓		172 x 70 x 65	390	302	91	1	3/12	R	westinghouse.com.au
65	70	28	85	84	469 / 465	39	93	94		✓	✓		164 x 70 x 71	420	313	103	1	3/16	R	kelvinator.com.au
85	80	95	85	84	540 / 526	28	90	92		✓	✓		172 x 79 x 70	519	360	159	2	3/17	R or L	fp.com.au
85	60	80	90	82	540 / 560	30	90	92		✓	✓		170 x 79 x 72	519	360	159	2	3/17	Rev	fp.com.au
80	65	62	80	89	428 / 401	34	93	95		✓	✓	✓	172 x 81 x 75	510	349	156	2	2/8	R or L	electrolux.com.au
75	65	70	70	88	428 / 422	32	93	95	✓	✓	✓		171 x 79 x 62	505	349	156	2	2/8	R	electrolux.com.au
90	35	57	75	84	532 / 520	35	92	94		✓	✓	✓	172 x 79 x 71	510	349	156	2	3/10	R or L	westinghouse.com.au
55	80	52	0	85	448 / 460	37	na	na	✓			✓	170 x 70 x 75	452	323	70	2	3/4	Rev	bosch.com.au
55	75	54	65	88	422 / 393	28	na	na	✓		✓	✓	177 x 68 x 71	465	338	127	1	2/4	R	panasonic.com.au
90	65	56	90	83	532 / 537	34	92	94		✓	✓	✓	172 x 80 x 71	510	352	158	2	3/10	R	westinghouse.com.au
70	50	59	85	87	428 / 448	42	93	95	✓	✓	✓	✓	172 x 81 x 71	510	331	132	2	2/8	R	electrolux.com.au
50	60	72	85	85	525 / 508	38	86	90			✓		172 x 78 x 73	515	361	154	1	3/7	R	lg.com.au
90	65	83	70	90	530 / 445	37	na	na	✓	✓	✓	✓	177 x 91 x 77	634	423	211	2	4/13 (D)	na	haier.com.au
85	80	78	90	82	645 / 632	32	90	92		✓	✓	✓	179 x 90 x 70	610	433	181	2	2/14	na	fp.com.au
82	50	85	85	81	774 / 724	35	86	90	(B)	✓	✓	✓	178 x 91 x 72	730	452	250	2	4/8 (D)	na	lg.com.au
90	80	60	80	80	603 / 601	39	92	94		✓	✓	✓	173 x 80 x 77	510	349	156	2	3/10	na	westinghouse.com.au
90	55	46	80	79	555 / 613	39	93	95		✓	✓		171 x 79 x 62	510	349	156	2	2/8	na	electrolux.com.au
85	65	81	75	82	637 / 574	39	86	91		✓	✓		178 x 82 x 77	527	352	175	2	2/4	na	samsung.com.au
85	65	79	75	82	638 / 619	37	86	90		✓	✓		176 x 90 x 73	567	353	214	0	3/8	na	lg.com.au
80	75	74	90	81	650 / 665	38	na	na	(C)	✓	✓		179 x 90 x 73	618	377	241	2	3/6	na	daewooelectronics.com.au
85	45	90	75	84	605 / 596	36	92	94		✓	✓		177 x 90 x 75	606	357	249	2	3/12	na	westinghouse.com.au
85	45	85	50	83	637 / 657	40	92	94	✓	✓	✓		176 x 100 x 74	700	450	250	2	3/11	na	westinghouse.com.au
90	55	67	60	81	672 / 650	35	86	91		✓	✓		179 x 91 x 72	600	363	237	2	4/9	na	samsung.com.au
80	60	85	85	80	1019 / 800	na	92	94		✓	✓		172 x 151 x 66	730	370	360	1	4/21	na	westinghouse.com.au
90	55	70	55	75	951 / 947	na	90	92		✓	✓		170 x 128 x 72	840	451	389	1	4/32	na	fp.com.au
75	75	90	85	89	353 / 326	39	92	94		✓	✓		172 x 61 x 66	370	370	na	1	4/21	R	westinghouse.com.au
75	75	70	90	90	335 / 338	40	90	92		✓	✓		170 x 64 x 72	451	451	na	1	4/32	R	fp.com.au
75	55	56	0	83	362 / 377	32	90	92		✓		✓	160 x 53 x 57	266	266	na	1	5/19	R	fp.com.au

Backyard bliss

Chris Barnes helps you get the garden in shape with our recommended line trimmers, blowers and secateurs

Nutshell

- CHOICE reviews petrol and cordless line trimmers, cordless leaf blowers, electric blower vacs, and anvil secateurs.
- Most of the trimmers are recommended, but we found some disappointing performers among the blowers and secateurs – check the tables for the models to avoid.

Are you a keen gardener, itching to get back outdoors and get your hands dirty now that spring has finally sprung? Whether you're pruning, weeding and mulching garden beds, or just giving the garden a general tidy-up, having the right tools at hand can make a big difference.

So with all you green thumbs in mind, CHOICE has tested 13 line trimmers, including eight petrol and five cordless (battery) models, which we've added to our previously tested trimmers (*CHOICE*, Sep 13). We also looked at eight cordless garden blowers, two corded electric blower vacs and 12 pairs of anvil secateurs. We've found good performers at various price points.

Safety tips for power gardening

- Wear eye and ear protection when using a trimmer or blower. Gloves, sturdy shoes and long pants are also advisable.
- Read the instructions before use and keep kids and pets away.
- With corded electric garden tools, use a safety switch to minimise risk of shock if the cord is damaged, and only use extension cords rated for outdoor use.

LINE TRIMMERS

Line trimmers (aka lawn trimmers or whipper-snippers) come in straight- or curved-shaft models and can be powered by petrol, electric or battery motors. The newly tested petrol and cordless models are mostly straight-shaft. The petrol models tested are two-stroke (fuelled by a petrol/oil mix) except the Honda and TPE, which are four-stroke and use unleaded petrol.

Electric models are comparatively inexpensive, but require you to drag the cord around, which can be inconvenient or even unsafe. The cordless trimmers here are powered by lithium-ion (Li-ion) batteries. Most are 18V but the Stihl, Black & Decker and Ryobi RLT36 have 36V batteries. The Worx has a 40V battery, which probably contributes to its scoring in the top four among the cordless models. Electric and cordless models can't compete with petrol for performance, but they're easier to start, quieter while in use, and can be satisfactory for small yards.

WHAT TO BUY

PETROL LINE TRIMMERS

All recommended petrol models are excellent at trimming vertically and horizontally and for trimming long grass, and have comfortable handles, unless otherwise stated.

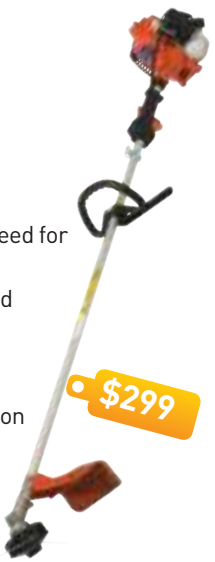
87%
Tanaka TCG 22EAS(SL)

Good points

- Good controls
- Excellent bump-feed for the cutting line
- Very well balanced
- Easy to respool

Bad points

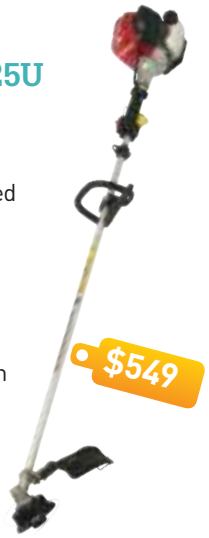
- Noticeable vibration



WHAT TO BUY

PETROL (cont'd)

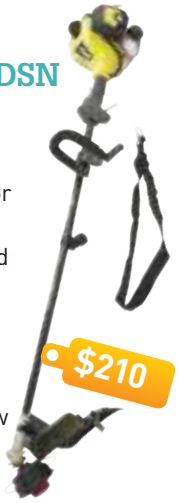
86%
Honda UMK425U



Good points
- Good controls
- Excellent bump-feed for the cutting line
- Very well balanced
- Easy to respool

Bad points
- Noticeable vibration
- The guard restricts visibility a fair bit while trimming

86%
Ryobi RBC254FSDSN



Good points
- Very good controls
- Excellent bump-feed for the cutting line
- The head can be rotated for easy edging
- Can attach cultivator, lawn edger, brush cutter, hedge trimmer or pruning saw

Bad points
- Noticeable vibration
- Only OK for ease of respooling

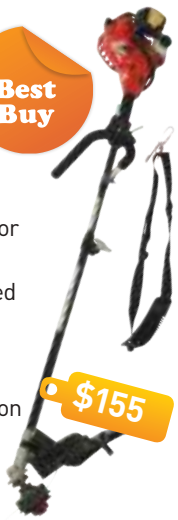
86%
TPE Brush Cutter TBC005 (Honda motor)

Good points
- Good controls
- Excellent bump-feed for the cutting line
- Very well balanced
- Easy to respool

Bad points
- Noticeable vibration

85%
Homelite HBC25SJSN

Best Buy



Good points
- Very good controls
- Excellent bump-feed for the cutting line
- The head can be rotated for easy edging

Bad points
- Very noticeable vibration
- The guard restricts visibility a bit while trimming
- Only OK for ease of respooling

83%
Morrison BC260 SST Split Shaft

Good points
- Good controls
- Excellent bump-feed for the cutting line
- Can attach cultivator, lawn edger, brush cutter, hedge trimmer or pruning saw

Bad points
- Only OK handle comfort
- Noticeable vibration
- Borderline for ease of respooling

80%
Victa Tornado Plus TTS2226

Good points
- Very good controls
- Very easy to respool
- Can attach lawn edger, hedge trimmer, pruning saw or pole extension

Bad points
- Adequate shaft length for edging, but some may find it too short for vertical trimming
- Noticeable vibration

PREVIOUSLY RECOMMENDED

PETROL

87% **Husqvarna** 122C, $199 (Sep 13)
87% **Husqvarna** 122LD, $299 (Sep 12)
86% **Stihl** FS 45, $299 (Sep 13)
85% **Rover** R2700, $169 (Sep 13)
85% **Shindaiwa** Home Pro 22T, $409 (Sep 12)
82% **Morrison** BC260B, $219 (Sep 12)
81% **Hitachi** CG22EAB, $249 (Sep 13)
81% **Shindaiwa** Home Pro 22F, $349 (Sep 10)

ELECTRIC

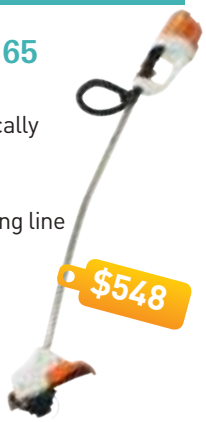
75% **Stihl** FSE 71, $229 (Sep 12)
74% **Flymo** Contour 700 Power Plus, $89 (Sep 13)
72% **Littl'** Juey LJ650E, $98 (Sep 13)
71% **Rok** 150-85-50087, $60 (Sep 13)
70% **Flymo** Contour 500XT, $79 (Sep 12)
70% **Flymo** Samurai 1000, $119 (Sep 10)

IMAGES: SHUTTERSTOCK

WHAT TO BUY
(cont'd)

CORDLESS LINE TRIMMERS

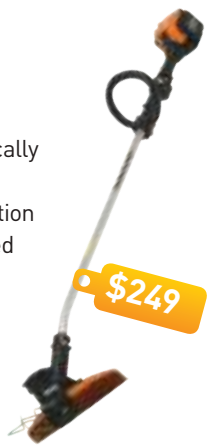
77% Stihl FSA 65



Good points
- Good at trimming vertically and horizontally
- Excellent controls and bump-feed for the cutting line
- Very easy to respool

Bad points
- Only OK at trimming long grass
- Noticeable vibration
- The guard restricts visibility a fair bit

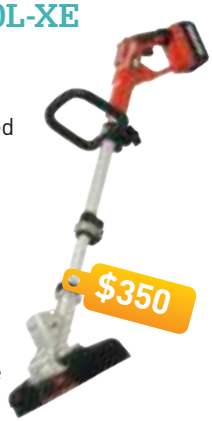
72% Worx WG168E



Good points
- Good at trimming vertically and horizontally
- Hardly noticeable vibration
- Good automatic line feed
- Easy to respool

Bad points
- Only OK at trimming long grass
- Controls are not particularly easy to use
- The guard restricts visibility a fair bit

70% Black & Decker Whipper Snipper GLC3630L-XE



Good points
- Excellent controls
- Good automatic line feed
- Easy to respool
- Head can be rotated for easy edging

Bad points
- Only OK at trimming vertically and horizontally; borderline at trimming long grass
- Noticeable vibration
- The guard restricts visibility a bit

WHAT TO LOOK FOR
See *CHOICE*, Sep 12, page 50

		Price ($)	PERFORMANCE: Overall score (%)	Performance score (%)	Ease of use score (%)	Noise (at user's position / at 7.5m, dB)	FEATURES: Clutch	Shoulder harness	Edging guide
PETROL	**Husqvarna** 122C	199	87	98	75	94 / 76	✓		
	Husqvarna 122LD	299	87	98	75	94 / 77	✓		
	• **Tanaka** TCG 22EAS(SL) (A)	299	87	98	76	97 / 77	✓		
	• **Honda** UMK425U	549	86	98	74	97 / 75	✓	✓	
	• **Ryobi** RBC254FSDSN	210	86	98	74	100 / 80	✓	✓	
	Stihl FS 45	299	86	98	73	98 / 81	✓		
	• **TPE** Brush Cutter TBC005 (Honda)	519	86	98	74	96 / 77	✓	✓	
	• **Homelite** HBC25SJSN	155	85	98	71	96 / 77	✓	✓	
	Rover R2700	169	85	98	71	102 / 82	✓		
	Shindaiwa Home Pro 22T	409	85	98	72	94 / 79	✓		
	• **Morrison** BC260 SST Split Shaft	269	83	98	68	102 / 81	✓	✓	
	Morrison BC260B	219	82	98	65	104 / 85	✓		
	Hitachi CG22EAB(SL)	249	81	88	74	97 / 78	✓		
	Shindaiwa Home Pro 22F	349	81	88	74	96 / 75	✓		
	• **Victa** Tornado Plus TTS2226	229	80	94	65	101 / 82	✓	✓	
	• **Bolens** BL160	149	79	88	69	97 / 84	✓		
	Stihl FS 38	249	79	88	69	96 / 75	✓		
	Makita RST210	199	78	88	67	98 / 79	✓		
	Makita RST250	299	78	88	67	104 / 73	✓		
	Honda UMS425U	369	76	88	63	110 / 76	✓		
	Troy-Bilt TB80 EC	174	76	78	73	100 / 83	✓		
	Echo GT-22GES	249	75	78	71	93 / 74	✓		
	McCulloch MT 260 CLS	179	72	78	65	100 / 81	✓		
	McCulloch MT 250 LK	129	69	68	69	97 / 75	✓		
	Victa Tornado TTB2226	199	69	78	59	105 / 79	✓	✓	
ELECTRIC	**Stihl** FSE 71	229	75	64	86	83 / 71	na		
	Flymo Contour 700 Power Plus	89	74	70	77	84 / 73	na		✓
	Littl' Juey LJ650E	98	72	68	75	85 / 72	na		✓
	Rok 150-85-50087	60	71	62	79	84 / 69	na		✓
	Flymo Contour 500XT	79	70	60	79	77 / 65	na		✓
	Flymo Samurai 1000	119	70	62	78	79 / 61	na		
	Bosch ART 30 Combitrim	119	68	64	72	84/70	na		✓
	Black & Decker GL741-XE	110	66	56	75	79 / 60	na		✓
	Echo GTE 350	89	65	46	84	84 / 72	na		
	Stihl FSE 41	79	52	20	84	85 / 66	na		✓
CORDLESS	• **Stihl** FSA 65	548	77	68	85	77 / 62	na		
	• **Worx** WG168E	249	72	68	75	80 / 68	na		✓
	Ryobi 36V Cordless Line Trimmer RLT36	299	71	58	83	81 / 72	na	✓	
	• **Black & Decker** Whipper Snipper GLC3630L-XE	350	70	58	81	82 / 66	na		✓
	• **Ryobi** RLT1830LiX4	189	69	58	79	79 / 62	na		✓
	• **Rockwell** RG8150	97	64	48	79	74 / 64	na		✓
	Black & Decker Cordless BST2018-XE	179	63	48	77	83 / 63	na		✓
	Black & Decker 18V Whipper Snipper GLC1825L-XE	189	63	46	79	79 / 62	na		✓
	Ozito Cordless Grass Trimmer LGT-118	97	60	36	83	76 / 60	na		
	Bosch ART 26 LI	189	49	26	71	73 / 58	na		

USING THE TABLE Price Recommended retail, as of July 2014, or the price we paid. **Scores** The overall score is made up of performance and ease of tested model. **(A)** Also sold as Hitachi CG22EAS. **na** Not applicable. . **A** Automatic. **B** Bump. **M** Manual. **C** Curved. **S** Straight.

SPECIFICATIONS

Shaft type	Line feed	Battery life / charge time (mins)	Weight (kg)	Length (cm)	Cutting diameter (cm)	Contact
C	B	na	5.0	157	44	husqvarna.com/au/
S	B	na	5.4	178	44	husqvarna.com/au/
S	B	na	5.1	180	45	hitachi-powertools.com.au
S	B	na	6.4	186	43	powerequipment.honda.com.au
S	B	na	5.9	180	46	ryobi.com.au
C	B	na	4.9	150	45	stihl.com.au
S	B	na	6.4	185	41	masters.com.au
S	B	na	5.5	172	46	bunnings.com.au
S	B	na	5.5	170	43	rovermowers.com.au
S	B	na	5.0	174	46	allpower.com.au
S	B	na	6.2	183	44	morrisonoutdoor.com.au
C	B	na	4.9	173	39	morrisonoutdoor.com.au
C	B	na	4.5	158	43	hitachi-powertools.com.au
C	B	na	5.0	160	32	allpower.com.au
S	M	na	5.5	170	42	victa.com.au
S	B	na	5.0	155	44	mtd.com.au
C	B	na	4.6	150	40	stihl.com.au
C	B	na	4.2	154	37	makita.com.au
C	B	na	4.6	156	40	makita.com.au
C	B	na	5.3	161	38	honda.com.au
S	B	na	5.6	168	43	troybuilt.com
C	B	na	4.5	153	40	allpower.com.au
C	B	na	5.9	152	43	mcculloch.com/au
C	B	na	4.3	136	44	mcculloch.com/au
C	M	na	5.2	162	40	victa.com/au
C	B	na	3.9	153	36	stihl.com.au
S	A	na	4.0	100-115	30	flymo.com.au
S	M	na	3.4	123	35	littljuey.com
S	B	na	3.1	106-136	35	bigw.com.au
S	A	na	3.8	102-118	26	flymo.com.au
C	B	na	4.8	146	35	flymo.com.au
S	B	na	3.4	80-115	30	bosch-garden.com.au/gardentools
C	A	na	3.3	120	33	blackanddecker.com.au
S	B	na	1.9	109-117	25	allpower.com.au
S	B	na	2.6	118-127	28	stihl.com.au
C	B	32 / 210	4.3	158	32	stihl.com.au
C	A	18 / 60	3.7	174	32	worxtools.com.au
C	A	30 / 100	3.9	153	28-33	ryobi.com.au
S	A	16 / 60-90	3.1	145	30	blackanddecker.com.au
S	A	40 / 120	3.0	127	25	ryobi.com.au
S	A	19 / 180	2.2	116	25	rockwelltools.com.au
S	A	ns / 60	3.2	106-130	30	blackanddecker.com.au
S	A	17 / 40	2.5	100-123	25	blackanddecker.com.au
S	M	16 / 120	2.1	108-132	23	ozito.com.au
S	M	25 / 180	2.2	77-112	25	bosch-garden.com.au/gardentools

use, weighted evenly. **Features** See What to Look For, CHOICE Sep 12 page 50. **TABLE NOTES** • Newly

ABOUT THE REST

The **Bolens** petrol lawn trimmer is good overall and worth considering. Of the other cordless trimmers, the **Ryobi RLT1830LiX4** is similar in performance and handling to the Black & Decker but its control is a little stiff to squeeze. The **Rockwell** is borderline at trimming vertically and horizontally, and poor at trimming long grass. It has a short shaft length.

BLOWER VACS

A leaf blower can save your back from the effort of raking, while a blower vac with a built-in mulcher turns those pesky leaves into mulch for your garden or compost. But before you throw away your rake, ask yourself whether you really need a leaf blower. In most yards with only a moderate quantity of leaves to clear up, a bit of exercise with a rake or broom might be better – and if you live in the suburbs, it'll make you more popular with the neighbours, too!

The cordless models tested are just blowers – use the blower to gather all the leaves into a pile, and then pick them up by hand (which may be easier anyway than fiddling around with converting from blower to vacuum). As with most cordless power tools, a more powerful battery tends to deliver better performance; the top three models have 40V, 36V and 20V batteries, while the rest are 18V.

WHAT TO BUY

CORDLESS LEAF BLOWERS

79% Worx WG568E

Good points

- Very good leaf-blowing performance
- Excellent controls
- Compact, fairly easy to point and well balanced
- Vibration hardly noticeable
- Excellent battery life – 26 minutes

Bad points

- A little heavy
- Noisy

78% Ryobi Kit RBL3626

Good points

- Very good leaf-blowing performance
- Excellent controls
- Compact, fairly easy to point and well balanced
- Vibration hardly noticeable
- Good battery life – 18 minutes

Bad points

- Fairly heavy
- Noisy

WHAT TO BUY (cont'd)

78% Worx WG545E.1

Good points

- Very good leaf-blowing performance
- Excellent controls
- Fairly lightweight
- Compact, easy to point and well balanced
- Very good battery life – 21 minutes

Bad points

- Noisy
- Vibration noticeable through the hand

71% Ryobi Kit RBL1802Li4

Good points

- Good leaf-blowing performance
- Very good controls
- Fairly lightweight
- Compact, easy to point and well balanced
- Very good battery life – 21 minutes

Bad points

- Noisy
- Some vibration through the hand

ELECTRIC BLOWER VACS

78% Victa Vac & Blow Electric VBE1500A

Good points

- Very good leaf-blowing and vacuuming performance
- Excellent controls
- Vibration hardly noticeable

Bad points

- Very noisy

ABOUT THE REST

The other cordless models are easy to use, but couldn't clear the test area before their batteries ran out. The **909** corded model has a narrow chute that clogs in use. Its trigger is tiring to use.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

Collection bag (for mulchers) that's easy to remove and empty, and not too big. The bigger it is, the heavier it'll be when full. **Easy to convert** from blower to vacuum mode - preferably without tools.

Comfort The handles should be comfortable, the blower vac shouldn't **vibrate too much**, and a **trigger lock** is handy so you don't have to keep holding down the trigger.

		PERFORMANCE				SPECIFICATIONS					
	Price ($)	Overall score (%)	Performance score (%)	Ease of use score (%)	Noise (at user's position/7.5m, dB)	Battery	Battery life/stated charge time (min)	Dimensions (cm, L x W x H)	Weight (kg)	Warranty (yrs)	Contact
CORDLESS LEAF BLOWERS											
Worx WG568E	270	79	80	75	76/68	40V, Li-ion	26/60	100 x 18 x 29	2.8	3	worxtools.com.au
Ryobi Kit RBL3626	279	78	80	73	80/68	36V, Li-ion	18/100	90 x 22 x 34	3.3	2	ryobi.com.au
Worx WG545E.1	149	78	80	73	76/68	20V, Li-ion	21/45	90 x 16 x 20	2.0	3	worxtools.com.au
Ryobi Kit RBL1802Li4	169	71	70	73	77/67	18V, Li-ion	21/120	87 x 16 x 26	2.1	2	ryobi.com.au
Black & Decker GWC1800L-XE	169	67	60	83	72/63	18V, Li-ion	11/40	93 x 16 x 28	1.7	4	blackanddecker.com.au
Bosch ALB 18Li	169	65	60	78	73/63	18V, Li-ion	11/210	84 x 16 x 22	1.7	ns	bosch-garden.com.au/gardentools
Wesco Blower WS18CB	69	63	60	70	78/67	18V, Ni-Cd	13/180-300	94 x 15 x 19	2.2	1	masters.com.au
Ozito LBL-018	97	60	50	83	67/62	18V, Li-ion	13/120	82 x 16 x 21	1.6	2	ozito.com.au
ELECTRIC BLOWER VACS											
Victa Vac & Blow Electric VBE1500A	209	78	80	72	84/70	na	na/na	98 x 50 x 94	10.7	1	victa.com.au
909 Upright Wheeled Blower/ Vacuum CXD1800	129	61	60	63	86/74	na	na/na	104 x 43 x 99	9.7	ns	masters.com.au

USING THE TABLE Price Recommended retail, as of July 2014, or the price we paid. **Scores** The overall score is made up of performance (70%) and ease of use (30%). **na** Not applicable. **ns** Not stated. All models are newly tested.

ANVIL SECATEURS

There's nothing more frustrating for a home gardener than hacking at your favourite roses with blunt secateurs, and seeing those delicate stems fray like rope between dull blades. And cutting back a shrub can take twice as long if you're using secateurs that aren't up to the task.

The most common type, bypass secateurs, work like scissors: the plant rests on the curved bottom blade and is cut by the sharper top blade as it slices past the bottom blade. Anvil secateurs have a flat blade (the "anvil") at the bottom. The top blade does the cutting, coming down onto the anvil like a guillotine.

We put 12 anvil secateurs to the same test as bypass secateurs (*CHOICE*, Sep 13) to see if they really are better at cutting harder and woodier stems as is often claimed. Sadly, many of the anvil secateurs are not up to the task. Only a few models performed well, with one recommended. The bypass models generally did much better.

A good pair (or two) of bypass secateurs – perhaps teamed with a lopper for bigger branches – is a better option.

TIP: Left-handers should look for models with a safety catch that's centrally mounted for ambidextrous use. The only pair here that's really unsuitable for lefties is the Fiskars. On the other hand, our female tester particularly liked the rolling handle on this model.

WHAT TO BUY

Best secateurs in the test overall. Very good for cutting performance and good for ease of use, these cut harder material, like dowel, reasonably well. Their size might not suit people with large hands, though only one of the testers marked them down for that.

83%

Wolf Garten RS-EN 7210 060

ABOUT THE REST

The **Fiskars**, **Barnel** and **Felco** anvil secateurs are good overall performers, but are less easy to use than the Wolf Garten; they don't feel as comfortable in the hand. The Barnel and Felco struggle a little with harder material. The rest are mostly OK at cutting thinner branches but struggle with thicker and harder material. The **Cyclone** and **Gard&Grow** struggle to cut anything at all. ■

		PERFORMANCE			SPECIFICATIONS		
	Price ($)	Overall score (%)	Performance score (%)	Ease of use (%)	Maximum cutting diameter (claimed, mm)	Weight (g)	Contact
Wolf Garten RS-EN 7210 060	33	83	86	75	19	223	taskmasterhardware.com.au
Fiskars Power Gear P91 111510	44	79	83	68	20	193	au.fiskars.com
Barnel B888 Professional Ergonomic Ratchet Pruner	33	72	73	68	23	214	eclipseenterprises.com.au
Felco 31	88	71	73	65	25	224	felco.com.au
Gardena Comfort 8787	30	70	68	75	20	220	gardena.com/au
Kamaki Home Garden KGS 205	54	69	70	65	19	234	taskmasterhardware.com.au
Spear & Jackson Razorsharp 6358RS+4056BS	21	62	65	55	20	230	spearandjackson.com.au
Burgon & Ball Anvil Secateur	39	60	60	61	ns	258	qualityproductsdirect.com
Bahco P138-22-F	70	58	58	58	28	261	bahco.com
Hortex Ratchet Action Secateur PRP515	20	45	43	50	15	221	bunnings.com.au
Cyclone Anvil Pruner	47	37	30	53	19	303	cyclone.com.au
Gard&Grow Heavy Duty Ratchet Pruner 500103	15	27	20	43	ns	224	mitre10.com.au

USING THE TABLE Price Recommended retail, as of July 2014, or the price we paid. **Scores** The overall score is made up of performance (70%) and ease of use (30%).**ns** Not stated. All models are newly tested.

IMAGES: SHUTTERSTOCK

A different class

Aussie cars lack the advanced safety features of their European counterparts, says **Martha Psiroukis**

Jeep lovers rejoice: the new two-litre diesel AWD Cherokee has finally been awarded a five-star safety rating in the latest Australasian New Car Assessment Program (ANCAP) safety ratings – an achievement which has eluded the popular brand until this year.

The improved rating is thanks to the Cherokee's full suite of airbags and a number of safety assist technologies (SATs) including roll stability, trailer stability, tyre pressure monitoring and daytime running lights as standard on all models. Unfortunately, some important SATs – namely, autonomous emergency braking (AEB), adaptive cruise control, blind-spot monitoring, reversing collision avoidance and lane support systems – are available only as added options on more expensive models.

ANCAP testing shows that while many new cars are now achieving excellent results for occupant safety (almost all are awarded five stars), there needs to be a further shift in focus towards crash prevention, and ANCAP scoring should reflect this. In order to address the problem of most newly tested cars currently achieving five stars, ANCAP will increase the requirements for maximum star ratings over the coming years.

SATs are widely used in Europe, but their use in Australia is being restricted by manufacturers who are only offering them at an additional cost or not

Nutshell

- Jeep is awarded its first five-star ANCAP rating for its Cherokee model.
- Nissan offers a key safety feature in its Qashqai models in Europe, but not in Australia.
- The safety focus needs to shift towards more crash prevention technologies across all makes for the Australian market.

This table lists all models tested since our last update in September 2013.

	PERFORMANCE
	ANCAP star rating
SMALL CAR	
Mazda 3 2014 onwards	★★★★★
Kia Pro_cee'd 2014 onwards	★★★★★
Kia Cerato Koup Oct 2013 onwards	★★★★★
Skoda Rapid 2014 onwards	★★★★★
Toyota Corolla Sedan 2014 onwards	★★★★★
Mitsubishi Mirage 2013 onwards	★★★★★
COMPACT SUV	
Nissan Qashqai July 2014 onwards	★★★★★
Peugeot 2008 2013 onwards	★★★★★
LARGE SUV	
Jeep Cherokee 2014 onwards	★★★★★
Nissan Pathfinder 2013 onwards	★★★★★
Toyota Kluger 2014 onwards	★★★★★
Toyota Prado August 2013 onwards	★★★★★
Isuzu MU-X 2013 onwards	★★★★★
LARGE CAR	
Mercedes-Benz C class July 2014 onwards	★★★★★
Infiniti Q50 2014 onwards	★★★★★
PEOPLE MOVER	
Peugeot 5008 2013 onwards	★★★★★
Citroen C4 Grand Picasso	★★★★★
Honda Odyssey 2014 onwards	★★★★★
Ssangyong Stavic 2013 onwards	★★★★
UTILITY/VAN	
Ford Ranger May 2014 onwards	★★★★★
Isuzu D-Max 4x4 Crew Cab Nov 2013 onwards	★★★★★
Tata Xenon (without ESC) 2013 onwards	★★

USING THE TABLE Source Crash test data from the Australasian New FIA Foundation. **Note:** It's not appropriate to compare ANCAP safety ratings advantage in a car-to-car crash. However, in single-vehicle crashes, such as occupant restraint systems, and these features can make up for the weight onwards without ESC cannot earn more than two stars or 16.49 points overall.

Overall score (out of 37)	Airbags	Frontal offset test (out of 16)	Side impact test (out of 16)	Pole test (out of 2)	Whiplash protection	Pedestrian protection	Safety features/ Seat belt reminders (out of 3)	Variants
36.40	Front, side and head	15.40	16	2	Good	Acceptable	3	All hatch and sedan variants
36.19	Front, side and head	15.19	16	2	Good	Acceptable	3	All variants
35.51	Front, side and head	14.51	16	2	Good	Acceptable	3	All Koup variants
35.37	Front, side and head	15.37	16	2	Acceptable	Acceptable	2	4-cylinder petrol only
34.88	Front, side, head and knee	14.88	16	2	Good	Acceptable	2	All variants
34.07	Front, side and head	14.07	16	2	Good	Acceptable	2	All variants including sedan
36.56	Front, side and head	15.56	16	2	Good	Acceptable	3	All variants
34.04	Front, side and head	14.22	15.81	2	Acceptable	Acceptable	2	All variants
36.16	Front, side, head and knee	15.16	16	2	Good	Acceptable	3	2-litre diesel AWD variants only
35.73	Front, side and head	14.73	16	2	Good	Marginal	3	All variants
35.57	Front, side, head and knee	14.97	16	2	Good	Marginal	2.6	All variants
35.11	Front, side, head and knee	15.11	16	2	na	Marginal	2	All variants and all engines
33.58	Front, side and head	13.58	16	2	Good	Marginal	2	All MU-X variants
36.46	Front, side, head and knee	15.46	16	2	Good	Good	3	C220 BlueTEC, C250 BlueTEC, C200 and C250 variants only
35.76	Front, side and head	14.76	16	2	Good	Acceptable	3	All 2WD variants
36.41	Front, side and head	15.41	16	2	Good	Marginal	3	All variants
34.53	Front, side and head	13.53	16	2	Good	Acceptable	3	All variants
32.75	Front, side and head	12.75	16	2	Good	Acceptable	2	All variants
24.55	Front, side and chest	9.06	15.49	na	na	na	0	2WD variants only
35.72	Front, side and head	15.72	16	2	Acceptable	Acceptable	2	All variants
33.58	Front, side and head	13.58	16	2	Good	Marginal	2	4 x 4 crew cab only
16.49 (A)	Dual front	11.27	16	na	na	na	0	4 x 2 dual cab only

ANCAP covers **95%** of new passenger cars and light commercial vehicles sold in Australia

Car Assessment Program (ANCAP), which is supported by Australian and New Zealand motoring clubs, all Australian state and territory governments, the New Zealand government, NRMA Insurance and the across vehicle categories, especially if there's a large weight difference. The reason is that in car-to-car crashes, theoretically the heavier vehicle has a advantage. Similarly, a higher ride height might be an with solid fixed objects, the weight might no longer be an advantage. Also, some small cars do remarkably well in crashes with larger vehicles as they have very strong passenger compartments and advanced disadvantage. **TABLE NOTES (A)** All the above vehicles have electronic stability control (ESC) as standard except the Tata Xenon. The Xenon's overall score has been truncated – a vehicle released in 2013 ANCAP has been advised that ESC will be available from mid-2014. **na** Not applicable.

IMAGES: SHUTTERSTOCK

at all. SATs are restricted for the Skoda Rapid, Honda Odyssey, Toyota Prado and Kluger, Infiniti Q50, Peugeot 2008, Mazda 3 and Mercedes-Benz C Class.

Another example is the newly rated Nissan Qashqai (previous versions were sold here as the Nissan Dualis), which was awarded five stars. While AEB is available on the European-sold Qashqai, it is not available at all on Australian and New Zealand models. If a safety technology is available, CHOICE thinks it should be offered regardless of where the vehicle is sold.

For information on how the ANCAP crash tests are conducted, log on to **choice.com.au/ANCAP**

CHOICE members Brett and Kim Gosschalk, with daughter Zoe

Plug-in and play

We asked the **Gosschalk family** to take this plug-in hybrid SUV out for a weekend test drive.

CHOICE members Kim and Brett Gosschalk and their six-year-old daughter, Zoe, put up their hands to take this hybrid SUV, the Mitsubishi Outlander PHEV Aspire, out for a weekend of domestic duties, including the grocery shopping, and a trip to Dural, NSW, for a family picnic.

The car tested was the top-of-the-range 2L petrol single-speed automatic (with manual selection option) and five seats. A basic version is also available.

The Gosschalks say

The Gosschalks found it easy to put Zoe in and take her out of the back seat, as there was plenty of space. The child seat anchors were very easy to locate on the back of the rear seats, and the window controls were out of Zoe's reach. While they weren't sure if the back would accommodate three child seats, they felt two would be fine and found the rear seat quite roomy.

They thought the boot space was great, finding that it easily fit a child's bicycle, bags and balls for a family day out. They didn't have any issues with space when the front passenger seat was pushed all the way back, as Zoe still had plenty of room.

Other features that impressed the Gosschalks were the seats' design and the range of adjustments of which they were capable. They felt the side mirror visibility was fantastic and liked the dash display of the interaction between the electric and petrol engines.

The overall performance and design of the car, as well as the size, rated highly with them. The fuel economy was "amazing", it was easy to drive, had great visibility, was comfortable and the added extras like the button to close the boot were luxuries. The one thing that counted against it was its high price tag.

MITSUBISHI OUTLANDER PHEV ASPIRE ELECTRIC ★★★★½

PRICE $54,990 (base model from $50,990)
CONTACT mitsubishi-motors.com.au
ANCAP SAFETY RATING 5 stars

CHOICE says

While the steering's a bit on the slow side, the leather-covered wheel is nice to hold. The leather seat is one of the more comfortable ones our tester has sat in, and tends to hold the driver in position when cornering due to its side bolsters.

The engine is quiet and comes on seamlessly when switching from electric to petrol. The cabin is well-insulated from road noise, although there's a slight wind noise coming from the A-pillars and the mirrors at speeds above 100 km/h. It has a reasonably pleasant interior.

The cargo hold is decent, with a flat floor. There's good visibility due to the high seat position, and a very good range of features. Despite the fuel economy testing below the claim, shorter drives with more use of the electric motor are likely to give you better economy.

1.9L vs 6.1L
Fuel usage claim vs measured per 100km

Plugging in to the hybrid market

You need a 15A plug to recharge the car; this is a drawback, as most people won't already have this and installation costs will vary. But if you do, it's easy to connect and takes about five hours to recharge.

While the fully charged battery indicator starts out by saying it'll give you around 50km on electric vehicle alone, this changes depending on your driving style and environment.

You can recharge the battery through driving purely on engine by pressing a button near the dash, which is handy if you want to use the very quiet electric engine when driving in a residential area.

The verdict

While the Gosschalks loved the Outlander PHEV Aspire, the big sticking point for them was the price. Our tester felt the car showed good performance for a fairly large and heavy model, and good economy given its weight, but its failure to meet its fuel economy claims and the steep sticker price may make you think twice. **MATT STEEN**

TOASTY TREATS

You can't go past a sandwich press or jaffle maker for tasty lunchtime creations, says **Rebecca Ciaramidaro**

Looking to create easy cafe-style lunches (or lazy weeknight dinners) with a minimum of fuss? You can't go past adding a sandwich press or jaffle maker to your collection of kitchen appliances.

Which one you buy depends on how often you're going to use it and what kind of snacks you're likely to create. If you're only interested in classics like cheese-and-tomato toasties, then a jaffle maker will do the job; if you want to be more adventurous and use thick specialty breads, then you'll need a versatile sandwich press. If you're only cooking for one, a two-slice press is fine, but for two people or more a four-slice model is the way to go.

Here we look at seven sandwich presses and four jaffle makers, and compare them to models that are still available from our previous tests. For performance, our tester assesses the colour and evenness of browning of the bread, and also looks at how well the press accommodates regular-sized bread by toasting cheese-and-tomato sandwiches. Extra tests are carried out on the sandwich presses using focaccia and ciabatta to see how well they accommodate thicker and crusty breads. Take care if you're using thicker breads to make sure your filling reaches the safe food temperature zone of at least 60°C.

Nutshell

- We review seven sandwich presses and four jaffle makers, as well as previously tested models, priced from $19 to $90.
- Consider what you'll make and how often you'll use it before you go out and buy one.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

Safety The surfaces get very hot and in many cases the hotplate is exposed around the edges. Only use the heat-resistant handle and keep kids away at all times.

Cord storage underneath the bottom plate helps keep the benchtop tidy and the cord away from little hands.

Top plate If you can lock the sandwich press in place at various heights, you can use it for open melts. It's also easier when you don't have to keep holding it up to fill and remove snacks.

Storage latch locks the top and bottom together for easy carrying and vertical storage.

Indicator lights All sandwich presses have a power on and ready indicator light. However, some can be very dim. The best are those that also have "power on" and "ready" labelled with the corresponding light.

		PERFORMANCE			FEATURES				SPECIFICATIONS	
	Price ($)	Overall score (%)	Performance score (%)	Ease of use score (%)	Storage latch	Lockable top plate height adjustment	Cord storage	Can be stored vertically	Heat-up time (min:sec)	Contact
TWO-SLICE SANDWICH PRESS										
Breville BSG520 The Toast & Melt 2 Slice Sandwich Press	70	81	80	83	✓	✓	✓	✓	2:29	breville.com.au
Sunbeam GR8250B Compact Café Press	55	81	80	83	✓	✓	✓	✓	1:38	sunbeam.com.au
• **Breville** The Toast & Melt BSG220	50	80	80	80	✓	✓	✓	✓	2:15	breville.com.au
Kambrook Profile Compact Sandwich Press KSG220	60	73	70	80	✓		✓	✓	1:45	kambrook.com.au
• **Heller** 2 Slice Sandwich Press SP030	29	65	60	75	✓		✓		2:00	gafcontrol.com.au
Homemaker 2 Slice Sandwich Press LW-010D	19	66	60	80	✓		✓	ns	2:19	kmart.com.au
• **Modern Living** 2 Slice Sandwich Press TARSP30	20	59	50	80	✓		✓		2:50	target.com.au
• **Sunbeam** GR8210 Compact Café Grill	45	58	50	76	✓		✓	✓	2:05	sunbeam.com.au
FOUR-SLICE SANDWICH PRESS										
Breville BSG540 Toast & Melt 4 Slice Sandwich Press	90	81	80	83	✓	✓	✓	✓	3:16	breville.com.au
Sunbeam GR8450 Café Press 4+	90	81	80	83	✓	✓	✓	✓	2:19	sunbeam.com.au
• **Heller** 4 Slice Sandwich Press SP031	47	73	70	80	✓		✓		2:05	gafcontrol.com.au
Modern Living Sandwich Press LW-031	22	67	60	83	✓		✓	ns	1:53	target.com.au
• **Kambrook** Profile 4 Slice Sandwich Press KSG440	80	66	60	80	✓		✓	✓	2:05	kambrook.com.au
Russell Hobbs Sandwich Press RHSP801	59	60	50	83	✓		✓	✓	1:58	russellhobbs.com.au
• **Homemaker** 4 Slice Sandwich Press LW-8530	39	51	40	75	✓		✓	✓	2:30	kmart.com.au
JAFFLE MAKER										
• **Breville** The Big One BTS100	50	80	80	80	✓	na	✓	✓	3:20	breville.com.au
• **Cuisinart** Sandwich Grill WM-SW2A	60	70	70	70	✓	na		✓	3:50	cuisinart.com.au
• **Breville** The Original Seal & Cut BTS200	50	64	60	73	✓	na	✓	✓	4:25	breville.com.au
• **Tiffany** 2 Slice Sandwich Maker SM56	20	55	50	65	✓	na		✓	2:00	gafcontrol.com.au

USING THE TABLE Scores The overall score is made up of performance (70%) and ease of use (30%). **Features** See What to Look For, top. All newly tested models have the following features: non-stick plates, floating hinge (sandwich presses only), power indicator and ready indicator on/off lights, and non-slip feet. **Table notes** • Newly tested model. **na** Not applicable. **ns** Not specified.

WHAT TO BUY

80%
Breville The Toast & Melt BSG220 (2-slice)

Good points
- Very good toasting performance and very easy to use
- Good performance when toasting Turkish bread
- Adjustable top plate height for making melts
- Easy-to-clean exterior
- Very easy-to-clean hotplates

Bad points
- When toasting ciabatta, it flattens the sandwich towards the back and when cooked for eight minutes, the filling is heated to less than 60°C

80%
Breville The Big One BTS100 (jaffle maker)

Good points
- Very good toasting performance and very easy to use
- Very easy-to-clean exterior
- Easy-to-clean hotplates

Bad points
- None to mention

PREVIOUSLY RECOMMENDED

81% Breville BSG520 The Toast & Melt 2 Slice Sandwich Press	$70
81% Breville BSG540 The Toast & Melt 4 Slice Sandwich Press	$90
81% Sunbeam GR8250B Compact Café Press (2 Slice)	$55
81% Sunbeam GR8450 Café Press (4 Slice)	$90

ABOUT THE REST

TWO-SLICE SANDWICH PRESSES

The **Heller SP030, Modern Living TAR SP30** and **Sunbeam Compact Café Grill GR8210** presses don't have lockable top plates, so you can't use them for open melts. The Heller is slightly better for performance, but when it comes to focaccia and ciabatta it unevenly flattens the bread, as does the Modern Living. The Heller also has small hotplates compared with other two-slice models and so isn't as versatile when it comes to toasting various types of breads. The Sunbeam has a ribbed top hotplate that isn't easy to clean.

FOUR-SLICE SANDWICH PRESSES

The **Heller SP031**, **Homemaker LW-8530** and **Kambrook Profile KSG440** don't have lockable top plates for open melts. Of the three, the Heller performs the best overall, with a good result. The Kambrook is OK overall, but the cheese-and-tomato sandwich was unevenly toasted in our testing; the Homemaker performed poorly, with limited browning. The Homemaker also has ribbed hotplates that aren't easy to clean.

JAFFLE MAKER

The **Cuisinart** performs well, while the sandwiches in the **Breville The Original Seal & Cut BTS200** and **Tiffany** were unevenly toasted; filling oozing out of the Tiffany burnt on the hotplate and even the housing behind the hotplate. None of these three jaffle makers has hotplates that are easy to clean, but the Breville Seal & Cut has very sharp crevices where food can become trapped. The Tiffany's hotplate is comparatively small, and fitting two sandwiches side-by-side is difficult. ■

IMAGE: SHUTTERSTOCK

Rice is nice

Rice cookers do a good job of cooking rice, but do you really need one, asks **Corinna Horrigan**

Nutshell

- All the rice cookers in this test perform very well, especially on white rice.
- Sealed rice cookers are less messy, but some take a lot longer to cook rice.

This is the era of the multi-cooker – and you can certainly use one of those devices to cook your rice (see *CHOICE*, Jul 14). But if you have one and often find it's already in use cooking another part of your dinner, you may find one of these dedicated rice cookers useful, especially if you need to cook a lot of it for a hungry family. As an added bonus, they're also slightly better at it.

All the rice cookers tested are excellent at cooking white rice, and most are also excellent or very good for brown rice. While we've only added one new one to our recommended list (see page 70), you should find all of them will do the job well, and most are fairly easy to use. A couple seem to take a long time to cook rice on the standard setting, but are OK if you use the quick-cook option. As we've noted before, unsealed rice cookers tend to splash starchy water onto the benchtop when used at full capacity, which can mean extra cleaning.

The non-stick conundrum

Much online feedback on rice cookers concerns the longevity (or otherwise) of their non-stick coatings. Such coatings are designed to allow food to be removed from the pan easily, making it simpler to clean. Unfortunately, most non-stick coatings deteriorate within about five years. Some lower-quality ones can deteriorate quite a bit sooner.

Correct care of the coating can maximise its life. This involves seasoning and cleaning it according to the manufacturer's instructions, and using non-metal utensils. While high temperatures will shorten the life of these coatings, this shouldn't be a problem with rice cookers. Rice cookers without non-stick coatings are available, but may be harder to find.

Mighty Tiger?

We've had a few inquiries about Tiger brand rice cookers, so we included one in this test. Like the others, its excellent at cooking rice and it's one of the few standard rice cookers with a sealed lid that helps prevent mess. However, it isn't as easy to use as our recommended models and is the most expensive cooker in this test.

PREVIOUSLY RECOMMENDED (SEE *CHOICE*, APR 13)

LARGE	
Breville BRC460	$100
Panasonic SR-DF181WST	$109
Kambrook KRC400	$50
MEDIUM	
Breville BRC200	$35
SMALL	
Panasonic SR-DE103WST	$139

What's in a cup?

We separate rice cookers into large, medium and small capacities (see table, page 70). Size is defined by the maximum number of cups that can be cooked at the same time. As there is also a minimum number of cups you can cook, it's worth noting that a rice cooker cup is considerably smaller than the standard measuring cup – about 160mL instead of 250mL.

What to look for

- **Size** A large cooker is useful if you regularly cook large amounts, but you'll need a fair amount of space on your bench or in the cupboard for storage. A medium or small-capacity cooker takes up less room.
- **Non-stick bowl** for easy cleaning. The **quality** of the **non-stick coating** is also a consideration, as poor-quality coating will considerably shorten the life of the cooker.
- **Measuring cup** and **spatula/spoon** These are non-standard, so use these when following the manufacturer's instructions.
- **Steamer basket** or tray for steaming food.
- **Automatic shut-off** turns the cooker to a "warm" function to keep the rice at serving temperature for several hours.
- **Glass lid** lets you check progress without interrupting the cooking, but it can rattle and allow liquid to bubble over. A sealed lid prevents liquid from splattering out when cooking. See the table (page 70) for which cookers have which type of lid.
- **Removable cord** is useful for taking the cooker to the table for serving.

The risotto connection

The Breville Risotto & Rice has, as its name implies, a risotto function. To trial it, Fiona Mair, home economist from our test kitchen used it to make mushroom risotto. We didn't score this, but it was easy and the consistency good, though the rice was slightly overcooked. But if you don't have a rice cooker, try this delicious risotto recipe.

MUSHROOM RISOTTO

Serves 6-8

INGREDIENTS

- 2 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil
- 1 med onion, finely chopped
- 1 clove garlic, crushed
- 2 cups arborio rice
- ½ cup dried porcini mushrooms (optional)
- 1 cup white wine
- 150g assorted mushrooms, chopped
- 2 litres hot stock (veg or chicken)
- 100g butter
- 150g parmesan cheese
- Salt and pepper to taste

METHOD

1. Place porcini mushrooms in a bowl and pour over enough hot water to cover. Soak for a few minutes or until soft. Strain and reserve the mushroom liquid. Chop the porcini mushrooms finely.
2. Heat oil in a 4L saucepan on medium.
3. Add onions and garlic, and fry until softened.
4. Add rice, stir for 1-2 minutes until grains are coated in oil.
5. Add wine and stir for about 5 minutes.
6. Pour porcini liquid through a fine strainer into pan.
7. Add mushrooms and soaked porcini and 1 cup of stock. Stir occasionally until stock has reduced.
8. Continue to add stock one cup at a time until rice grains are tender with a slight firmness in the centre.
9. Risotto should have a porridge-like consistency. Add butter and mix in.
10. Season to taste and serve immediately with extra parmesan.

How we test

Performance Fiona Mair, home economist from CHOICE's test kitchen, cooks jasmine and brown rice according the manufacturer's instructions and assesses the quality of the final product. High-quality cooked rice should be firm, separate and perfectly cooked – neither crunchy in the centre nor mushy on the outside. Fiona also checks for browning of the rice at the bottom of the bowl.

Ease of use She assesses how easy the appliances are to use, which includes assembly, cleaning, emptying and operating the controls.

IMAGE: SHUTTERSTOCK

WHAT TO BUY

LARGE (10 CUPS UNCOOKED RICE)

90%

Breville BRC520 Risotto & Rice

Good points

- Excellent for cooking performance
- Comprehensive instructions
- Touch controls are easy to use
- Beeps when cooking completed
- Very good for risotto and sautéing
- Steamer option
- Removable cord is easy to store
- Automatically sets to warm after cooking

Bad points

- Starchy water can bubble around glass lid and may splatter onto bench
- Glass lid can be difficult to clean

		PERFORMANCE					FEATURES & SPECIFICATIONS				
	Price ($)	Overall score (%)	Jasmine rice score (%)	Brown rice score (%)	Ease of use score (%)	Cooking times – jasmine / brown rice / quick setting (min) *	Sealed lock-in lid	Removable cord	Weight (kg)	Height (cm)	Contact
LARGE CAPACITY (10 cup uncooked)											
• **Breville** BRC520 Risotto & Rice	80	90	100	95	79	19 / 40 / na		✓	2.5	25	breville.com.au
Breville BRC460 The Rice Box	100	89	100	95	76	45 / 75 / na	✓	✓	3.8	28	breville.com.au
Panasonic SR-DF181WST	109	89	100	95	76	35 / 110 / na	✓	✓	2.9	24	panasonic.com.au
Kambrook KRC400	50	88	100	95	73	24 / 46 / na	✓	✓	2.8	28	kambrook.com.au
Tefal 3-in-1 Rice Cooker	90	87	100	95	70	26 / 50 / na	✓	✓	3.3	29	tefal.com.au
Tiffany RC10A	30	84	100	95	64	20 / 47 / na		✓	2.3	31	gafcontrol.com.au
• **Panasonic** SR-DE183WST	159	83	100	80	73	37 / 110 / 16	✓	✓	3.4	24	panasonic.com.au
Sunbeam Rice Perfect 10 RC4750	60	81	95	75	76	23 / 50 / na		✓	2.9	33	sunbeam.com.au
Homemaker RC-4700-A	20	78	95	75	68	21 / 56 / na		✓	2.8	34	shop.kmart.com.au
Heller RC10SS	40	77	95	75	64	21 / 40 / na		✓	2.5	31	gafcontrol.com.au
MEDIUM CAPACITY (7/8 cup uncooked)											
Breville BRC200 Set & Serve	35	88	95	95	78	29 / 51 / na		✓	2.4	31	breville.com.au
• **Breville** BRC310 Set & Serve	70	87	100	90	75	24 / 54 / na		✓	2.3	24	breville.com.au
Sunbeam Rice Perfect Deluxe 7 RC5600	55	87	95	95	75	21 / 42 / na	✓	✓	2.5	25	sunbeam.com.au
• **Tefal** RK704E Fuzzy Logic Rice Cooker	150	87	100	90	74	50 / 90 / 38	✓	✓	4.1	23	tefal.com.au
• **Kambrook** KRC8	30	81	100	75	71	26 / 55 / na		✓	2.0	24	kambrook.com.au
• **Maxim** Kitchenpro MRC-5CSS	40	80	100	75	68	21 / 49 / na	✓	✓	2.1	26	maximhousewares.com
SMALL CAPACITY (5 cup uncooked)											
Panasonic SR-DE103WST	139	89	100	95	76	41 / 119 / na	✓	✓	2.9	26	panasonic.com.au
Kambrook Rice Express KRC5	25	87	95	95	75	25 / 47 / na			1.6	22	kambrook.com.au
• **Panasonic** SR-DF101WST	89	85	100	90	71	32 / 105 / 22	✓	✓	2.6	20	panasonic.com.au
• **Tiger** JNP-1000 Electric Rice Cooker	214	85	100	90	70	22 / 54 / na	✓	(A)	2.1	26	tigerricecookeraustralia.wordpress.com
Homemaker CFXB-40C-A	14	83	90	95	68	31 / 56 / na			1.6	25	shop.kmart.com.au
• **Abode** Rice Cooker CFXB-20	13	81	100	75	71	25 / 54 / na		✓	1.6	21	bigw.com.au
• **Tiffany** RC5A	20	80	100	75	68	25 / 49 / na		✓	1.5	21	gafcontrol.com.au
Sunbeam Rice Perfect 5 RC2350	30	79	95	65	78	27 / 46 / na		✓	1.8	27	sunbeam.com.au

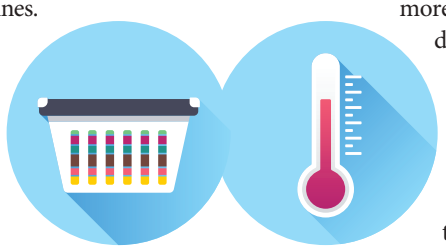
USING THE TABLE Price Recommended or average retail, as of August 2014. **Capacity** Manufacturer cup measures used, not the standard 250mL cup. See What's in a Cup?, page 69. **Scores** The overall score is made up of cooking performance – jasmine rice (30%), brown rice (30%) – and ease of use (40%). **Features** See What to Look For, page 69. **TABLE NOTES** • Newly tested. * These exclude the warm time that's needed to complete the cooking. Most manufacturers recommend at least 10–15 minutes. **(A)** Retractable. **na** Not applicable or not tested.

IMAGE: SHUTTERSTOCK

Hungry heat

Our new method shows clothes dryers chew through energy, as **Matthew Steen** finds

A few years ago, CHOICE changed the way we test clothes washers to reflect how consumers really use their washing machines. Now we've done the same with our clothes dryers test, retesting the most popular models on the market to see how they fare with the new method. We only recommend three of nine dryers in this test due to their high energy use and long cycle times. In time, we hope this situation will improve.



We also removed the ease of use component of the test, because clothes dryers are all similar in this respect and members have told us that they're more interested in drying and energy efficiency. This means that previous results are not comparable to those in this test; however, you can still check our previous test which had 29 dryers (*CHOICE,* Mar 14, page 72), including a gas model, heat pump and condenser models.

Nutshell

- We changed our test method to reflect a typical load of laundry, showing up some harsh realities when it comes to the energy-hungry nature of electric vented dryers.
- Of nine dryers tested, only three are recommended.

What's changed?

We've started testing with a 3.5kg load in all machines, using the international standard (IEC) load items. We expect that the Australian standard will use these items in future as they slowly move toward an uptake of international standards.

WHAT TO BUY

We base CHOICE recommendations on a dryer reaching at least 70% for its overall score.

The sun / natural convection

GREEN BUY

$50+

A clothesline / rack

HOW WE TEST

Energy efficiency We test by putting a standard 3.5kg wet load of washing into the dryer and measure how long it takes to dry and the energy used. Energy efficiency and drying time scores are based on the energy and time used per kilogram of clothing.

Drying time We use the sensor program to determine when clothes are dry if the dryer has one; otherwise, we test using the timer.

ABOUT THE REST

Unfortunately, the majority of dryers on the market are timer-based electric vented versions, which chew through energy unless you really fine-tune the settings. If you're willing to swallow the costs, go for the highest overall scoring dryers. Happily, none of those tested starts automatically when the door is shut – good news if you have adventurous little ones.

Electric vented dryers

75%
Electrolux EDV6051

Good points
- Has very dry program
- Has auto-sensor programs
- Has crease-free option
- Has low-temperature program
- Relatively short cycle time
- Has delay time
- Has child-lock controls

Bad points
- None to mention

74%
Electrolux EDV5051

Good points
- Has very dry program
- Has auto-sensor programs
- Has crease-free option
- Has low-temperature program
- Relatively short cycle time
- Has delay time
- Has child-lock controls

Bad points
- None to mention

	COSTS			PERFORMANCE					
	Price ($)	Running costs ($, over 10 years)	Cost per kg (c)	Overall score (%)	Drying time score (%)	Energy efficiency score (%)	Cycle time (min)	Noise (dB)	Energy used per load (kWh)
Electrolux EDV6051	739	1272	24	75	80	70	111	57	3.26
Electrolux EDV5051	679	1279	24	74	79	70	113	56	3.28
Fisher & Paykel DE50F56E1	529	1298	25	71	74	69	125	55	3.33
Simpson 39S600M	679	1575	30	60	60	59	161	56	4.04
Simpson 39S500M	619	1636	31	59	60	57	161	56	4.19
Simpson 39P400M	469	1664	32	58	59	56	162	55	4.27
Fisher & Paykel DE40F56A2	369	1838	35	52	54	50	174	56	4.71
Whirlpool AWD60CE	499	2037	39	44	44	44	200	52	5.22
Haier HDY-60M	299	2460	47	31	33	29	228	56	6.31

IMAGE: THINKSTOCK

71%
Fisher & Paykel DE50F56E1

Good points
- Has very dry program
- Has auto-sensor programs
- Has crease-free option
- Has low-temperature program
- Has delay time
- Has child-lock controls

Bad points
- None to mention

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

- **Controls – auto-sensing vs timer** Some dryers have a timer that is set manually, while others have a sensor that detects when a load has reached a preset dryness level and automatically switches off. Some have both options. It's easier to overshoot the drying level with timer dryers and waste energy, so aim for less time and check the clothes periodically to avoid this, as well as potential damage to the clothes.
- **Filters** Dryer filters collect fluff quickly and need regular cleaning, so it's helpful if the filter is at the front where it's easy to reach and detach.
- **Vents/ducting** Moist, hot air from venting dryers must be able to get out of your laundry to prevent dripping walls and mouldy ceilings. If you have an exhaust fan or can put your dryer near a window, you may not need to worry about this; otherwise, you're likely to need a venting kit. Some dryers come with one, while for others it's an optional extra. However, not all ducting kits suit all situations. Discuss installation with sales staff to make sure you get what you need. Some dryers that have a vent at the front to exhaust the air cannot be ducted, making an exhaust fan or window more important. The table below shows which dryers are front-vented and whether they can be ducted.
- **Wall-mountable or stackable** Mounting a dryer on the wall or stacking it on top of a front-loading washing machine saves space.
- **Reverse tumbling** The drum reverses the direction of tumbling at regular intervals to minimise tangling while evenly drying clothes.
- A **drying rack** can be mounted inside some models to hold items you don't want to tumble, such as gym shoes or delicates. Some can be attached to the front of the vent.
- **Temperature settings / programs** The more you pay, the more features you are likely to get, including individual programs such as jeans dry, iron dry, cupboard dry, and so on. ■

		FEATURES							SPECIFICATIONS					
Brand reliability (%)*	Brand loyalty (%)*	Auto sensing	Delay start	Anti-crease	Controls	Reverse tumbling	Drying rack	Wall-mountable / stackable	Air exhaust (vent) location	Ducting kit	Filter location	Claimed capacity (kg)	Dimensions (cm, H x W x D)	Contact
92	95	✓	✓	✓	Sensor	✓		✓/✓	Front or rear	Optional	Inside front	6	80 x 60 x 62	electrolux.com.au
92	95	✓	✓	✓	Sensor	✓		✓/✓	Front or rear	Optional	Inside front	5	80 x 60 x 58	electrolux.com.au
91	95	✓	✓	✓	Sensor	✓	✓	✓/–	Front	Optional	Inside front	5	80 x 57 x 56	fp.com.au
93	97				Timer	✓		✓/✓	Front or rear	Optional	Inside front	6	80 x 60 x 61	simpson.com.au
93	97				Timer	✓		✓/✓	Front or rear	Optional	Inside front	5	80 x 60 x 56	simpson.com.au
93	97				Timer	✓		✓/✓	Front or rear	Optional	Inside front	4	80 x 60 x 52	simpson.com.au
91	95				Timer			✓/–	Front	na	Door	4	80 x 57 x 44	fp.com.au
92	89		✓		Timer		✓	✓/–	Front	na	Door	6	83 x 60 x 56	whirlpool.com.au
na	na				Timer		✓	✓/–	Front	na	Door	6	80 x 60 x 56	haier.com.au

USING THE TABLE Scores The overall score is made up of: energy efficiency (50%) and drying time (50%). **Features** See What to look for, above. **Running costs** This is based on drying a 3.5kg load about three times a week (150 times a year) for 10 years and is calculated based on electricity at 26c/kWh. **Price** Recommended retail, as of August 2014. **TABLE NOTES na** Not available. * From our member survey: choice.com.au/reliability

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HARD WORD

Thanks this month go to Scott Mckenzie, Francois Bolle, Elke Nicholson and Squirrel Main, along with CHOICE staff. If you have any other examples you'd like to share with other CHOICE members, send them with your full name to The Hard Word, 57 Carrington Road, Marrickville, NSW 2204. Please don't email us your entries – we need the unmarked originals.

Compiled by Siobahn Donohoe

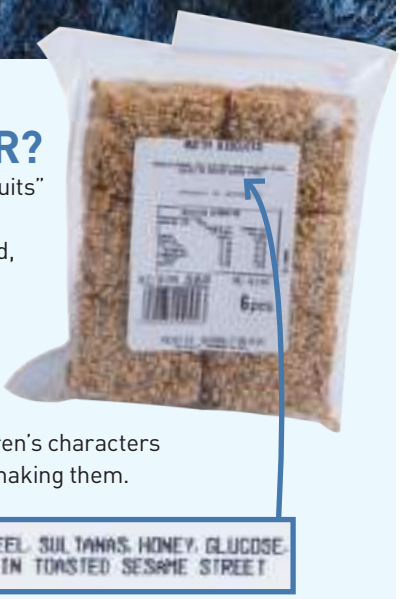
IMAGE: NBCNEWS.COM

Off target

Does this card design company need a new definition of the term "age-appropriate"?

COOKIE MONSTER?

These "nutty biscuits" certainly deserve their moniker (and, delightfully, were submitted to Hard Word by one "Squirrel Main"). We hope no loveable children's characters were harmed in making them.



PIE-EYED

Only at a pie-eating competition could six pies be considered a single serve!

Aussie as, bro

Looks like the Kiwi-Aussie divide has been finally bridged by these cross-trainer socks.

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